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GEAR LAST**

HIKE TO RUINS

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SLOW HIKING**

**LIVIN'
THE
DREAM**

**BEST JOBS
IN THE
OUTDOORS**



A serene winter scene featuring a person fishing in a calm river. The person, wearing a red hat and dark clothing, stands in the water, holding a fishing rod. The river is surrounded by snow-covered evergreen trees and large rocks in the foreground. In the background, a snow-capped mountain rises above a dense forest. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and quiet.

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Go to backpacker
.com/fieldscouts
for their weekly
reports.

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editor's note

BY DENNIS LEWON

Longs Peak is easy to identify from a distance because of its large, flat summit.



Come Visit

Join the BACKPACKER staff for a Colorado adventure.



WATER POOLS AND DROPS THROUGH meadows knee-deep with summer's bounty: columbines, Indian paintbrush, primrose. I wade through the grass, chasing my three kids as they climb higher, following the stream up toward its headwaters at an unnamed lake just below the Continental Divide. We'll camp where the valley narrows, right at treeline, and then scramble up

a peak on the Divide. But there's no hurry. We don't have to worry about other hikers occupying our camp or crowding the route above. No trail crosses the meadow and there are no people to share it with.

Sounds like a million great places in the mountains, right? But this spot is special because the trailhead is less than hour from Boulder, Colorado, where I live. It's special because the hike is only a few hours, yet whenever I go there I feel a million miles away. It's special because Front Range hikers flock to the local trails every summer weekend, but even on the nicest Saturday in August, no one seems to go here.

Elsewhere in this issue, we share some of the best-kept secrets in the outdoors (check the insider tips on Escalante, page 16). But I'm not telling you where my Colorado getaway is. I will, however, take you there.

I'm inviting readers to join me and the BACKPACKER staff in Boulder this summer for a unique adventure. And all you have to do to join is commit to helping kids get into the wilderness.

You already know that BACKPACKER is a longtime supporter of Big City Mountaineers (bigcitymountaineers.org), a nonprofit organization that mentors underprivileged youth in the outdoors. Just in the last three years, we've led fundraising climbs on Mt. Whitney, Mt. Shasta, and the Grand Teton. In that time, I've had the good fortune to hike with dozens of readers, and we've collectively raised about \$500,000 for Big City Mountaineers. That money supports hundreds of weeklong backpacking trips for teens, many of whom have never seen a trail or camped a single night.

How do you raise the bar on a program like this? In 2016, we're doing something new. We're hosting our fundraising trips in Colorado, where we can take you to the places I and the rest of BACKPACKER's staff love—the places near our Boulder home, where we go with our families and friends. After the hikes, we'll celebrate with an evening in Boulder, where you'll tour the BACKPACKER offices and meet some of our friends from the outdoor industry.

We're planning three different trips: Long's Peak, the Collegiate Peaks, and my favorite local meadow, described above. None of the routes are technical—no climbing skills required—but participants should be comfortable in alpine terrain. Here are the dates, and what you can expect:

Collegiate Peaks

On this peakbagging trip, we'll tag a trio of Fourteeners: Mt. Belford, Mt. Oxford, and Missouri Mountain. The peaks are clustered in the spectacular Collegiate Peaks Wilderness, where we'll camp before the summit climbs. No experience required, but you'll need strong legs: If we make it to the top of all three, expect more than 7,000 feet of elevation gain.

DATES July 15-17, 2016

FUNDRAISING GOAL \$2,500

Longs Peak

This 14,259-foot summit in Rocky Mountain National Park is one of the premier climbs in Colorado. We'll backpack to the Boulder Field, the highest established campsite in the National Park System, then get up early the next morning and climb the Keyhole Route. This classic ascent is a fun scramble, with views across the Rockies.

DATES August 12-14, 2016

FUNDRAISING GOAL \$3,500

Indian Peaks

You'll have to trust me on this one. For this trip we'll head to one of my favorite spots in the mountains close to Boulder. We'll hit the Continental Divide before returning to town to attempt a dayhike that's on my personal bucket list: the Boulder Skyline Traverse, a 16-mile route linking all five major peaks that loom over town. Even locals brag about bagging this one.

DATES August 19-21, 2016

FUNDRAISING GOAL \$2,000

Space is limited, of course, so if you're interested, don't wait. To register or get more info, go to backpacker.com/boulder.



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AS WE SKIN UP THE TRACK



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GEAR

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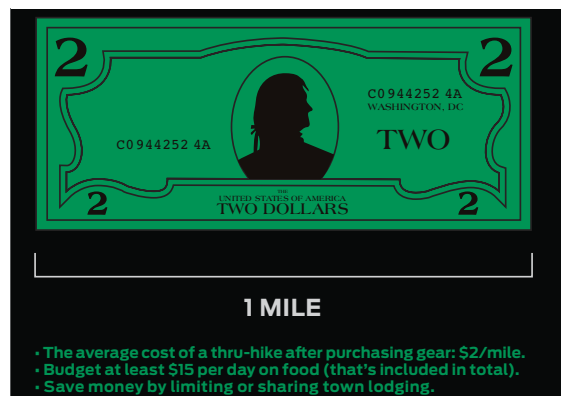
NORTH CASCADES, WASHINGTON
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#trailchat

YOUR OPINIONS, PHOTOS, AND FEATS

Overheard



Our thru-hiking tips (“Cheat Sheet,” November 2015) prompted a slew of readers to share their own advice. **Tom Johnson**, who often hosts thru-hikers at his home near the Appalachian Trail, says that our Cheat Sheet should be required reading for budget-challenged aspirants. “By the time they get to our house about 100 miles south of the midpoint, many of them are out of money, and they turn into trail bums,” he said.

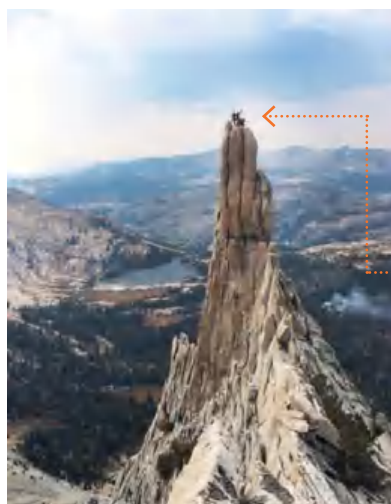
Scott Fecher seconded the importance of setting bite-size goals. “A thru-hike is not a 2,000-mile hike,” he advised. “It is a string of connected 50- to 100-mile hikes with a resupply and All You Can Eat in between.”

Mark Naugle urged would-be thru-hikers to give in and embrace the dirt. “You’ll get used to grungy,” he wrote.

Sled-Pulling Pro Tip

After reading our guide to hauling a sled in winter (November 2015, page 29), **James Leathem** wrote in with his own pro tips for easy hauling. “If you use two sections of half-inch PVC pipe, 6 or 7 feet long, with rope threaded through them, you now have inexpensive rigid poles to pull the sled with,” he said. “Install a few 2-inch eye bolts down both sides of the sled for bungee cord anchor points and you can secure your load.”

Double Take



Our May 2015 cover image of a climber posing on top of Yosemite’s Eichorn Pinnacle inspired **Jared Allred** so much, he decided he had to recreate it himself. “We climbed Cathedral Peak and then made a side trip to this wonderful climb,” he wrote.

Throwback



Reader @YeahNova uncovered this August 1993 issue of **BACKPACKER**. We took a glimpse back.

Oh how it’s grown: At exactly 2,146.6 miles long, the Appalachian Trail was almost 43 miles shorter than it is today.

The cutting-edge Avocet Vertech Watch (\$100) could measure altitude, barometric pressure, and temperature. It had a stopwatch, too.

Writer **Todd Wilkinson** covered the debate over whether hikers should carry a novel product called bear spray. (Twenty-two years later, the verdict is in: Bear spray is a must-have in grizzly country and more effective than a gun in keeping hikers safe.)

The first two sections of the Erie Canalway Trail had just opened in New York. (The trail isn’t finished yet: More than 65 of its planned 365 miles are still under construction.

Discover **YOUR** **Adventure**

Avid outdoorsman, extreme hiker and explorer, Erik Stensland lives a life of adventure.

But take a closer look...he's also a passionate nature photographer who loves to find the most hidden and isolated locations in Rocky Mountain National Park to perfect his craft. He sets off during the night, alone into the mountains, to be at just the right spot when the first light of day hits the peaks.

Erik's gear is an essential partner in the pursuit of his art. The ProTrek 3500's benefits are a perfect match to Erik's needs in the backcountry. Knowing his current elevation is essential as he hikes toward his destination often in the dark. Mountain weather patterns vary greatly and gauging barometric pressure helps to predict safe weather conditions. The ProTrek 3500 is also low temperature resistant (-20°C/-4°F). Most importantly, easy access to the sunrise and sunset times for a specific location guarantee that Erik is set up to capture the ideal shot—typically occurring within 15 minutes of sunrise or sunset.

For more on Erik's adventure in the mountains of Colorado, visit protrek.casio.com



The feature Erik uses most?

"The barometer. For dramatic photos I am generally looking for changing weather conditions. We have a saying in the landscape world that bad weather is good weather. I rely on this feature while I'm out in the mountains for days at a time, hoping for bad weather."

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 in pressure



Sudden rise
 in pressure



Sustained rise
 in pressure,
 now turning
 downward (high-pressure
 system passing)



Sustained drop
 in pressure,
 now turning
 upward (low-pressure
 system passing)



Comeback

A study by the U.S. Geological Survey found good news for grizzlies: The number of bears in the Yellowstone area that successfully reproduce has quadrupled over the past 25 years. Now, some hunters are pushing for the federal government to cancel the animal's protections. We asked our Facebook followers: **Should grizzlies lose their place on the endangered species list?**

YOUR VOTES



18%

"It becomes dangerous for humans and grizzlies when too many bears are around."

— John Nelson



82%

"States will reinstitute sport hunting, and all of the progress will be for nothing."

— Hannah Lantzer

Hawaii's latest hot spot



Backtracking

In our November 2015 issue, we spotlighted Kilauea's Pu'u O'o vent (page 18), one of the few places where hikers could see an active lava flow up close. Unfortunately, wrote reader **Emily Sayward**, that particular flow stopped running in 2013. "The lava is still flowing on the Big Island, but only on private property," she said. Visitors can still see lava on a 6-mile hike with Ahiu Hawaii (ahiuhawaii.com), but at \$195 per person, it doesn't come cheap.

Conservation Gone Wild

Faced with an exploding population of beavers in the early 1950s, the **Idaho Department of Fish and Game** hatched a plan to relocate some of the critters into remote areas by parachute. Last fall, a departmental historian unearthed a documentary the state made about the effort (see the video at backpacker.com/beavers). It wouldn't be the last time scientists took an unconventional approach to wildlife management.



Mountain Goats

After aggressive mountain goats caused a trail closure in Olympic National Forest in 2012, the Forest Service sent biologist **Kurt Aluzas** to reinforce the animals' fear of humans by throwing rocks, shooting them with paintball guns, and screaming at them. The trail stayed open the next year.

Black Bears

Utah State University graduate student **Kari Signor** tried to condition black bears to avoid human food by feeding them baked goods dosed with the nausea-inducing chemical thiabendazole. (The bears weren't deterred.)

PHOTOS BY COURTESY OF EMILY SAYWARD; TIFFANY NGUYEN (@TIFFPENGUIN)
ILLUSTRATION BY GIOVANNI LEONE

Pricey Trails

A volunteer group in Hawaii is proposing to reopen Oahu's Haiku Stairs, a WWII-era mountain staircase that's been closed since the 1980s, by charging out-of-state hikers up to \$100 for a permit to climb it. (The money would go toward necessary trail maintenance; Hawaii residents would pay between \$5 and \$20.) We rounded up five more trails that are worth the price tag.

West Coast Trail, British Columbia
\$114 for permit and fees
Contact bit.do/westcoasttrail

Chilkoot Trail, Alaska
\$65 (page 62)

MORE

Snowman Trek, Bhutan
~\$6,250 (\$250/day minimum for Bhutan tourists during high season, times 25 days, not including additional trekking permits)
Contact bit.do/snowmantrek

Son Doong Cave, Vietnam
\$3,000 for five-day trek
Contact bit.do/sondoong

Havasupai Trail, Arizona
\$40 per person
Contact bit.do/havasupai

LESS



Instagram

Reader [@TiffPenguin](#) snapped this shot of Havasu Falls' brilliant blue pools in Arizona. The water's color comes from a high concentration of dissolved calcium carbonate. "It's a 10-mile hike to get there, but the views are well worth the trek," she says.



Jumping for joy on the summit of Red Lady above Crested Butte, CO – Xavi Fane

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the playlist

This month's top
trips and picks



1

**Come out of hibernation.
Grays and Torreys Peaks,
Arapaho National Forest, Colorado**

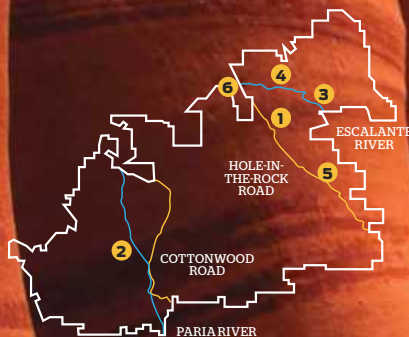
The surest way to solitude? Go now. Let others wait for the snow to melt. Fourteeners Grays (back right) and Torreys (back left) draw conga lines of peakbaggers come July. But not in late winter—when Photo Editor Genny Fullerton and her crew took the lesser-known West Ridge Route, a path that starts at 12,000-foot Loveland Pass and follows the Continental Divide about 5 miles to the top of 14,267-foot Torreys. “All we needed on the windblown ridges were microspikes,” she says. “Because the trailhead is so high, the altitude hits as soon as you hit the trail. On the plus side, the amazing views are also immediate.” **Contact** bit.do/torreys-overview



INSIDER'S

2

GUIDE



Play the slots in Zebra Canyon. The 5-mile out-and-back begins at a pullout off Hole-in-the-Rock Road near 37.639428, -111.445808.

Canyon Country

Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, Utah

If it's true desert wilderness you seek—snaking slots, deep red-rock chasms, and secret swimming oases—then you can't do better than this 1.9-million-acre park sprawling across southern Utah. And with temperatures starting to hit their springtime best in March, now is the perfect time for a slickrock adventure.

BY ELISABETH KWAK-HEFFERAN

The insider

Rick Green may be king of the desert rats: As the 16-year owner of the outfitter Excursions of Escalante, he racks up some 200 canyon days every year. Totaled, that's more than six solid years of exploring Escalante's hidden corners.

1. Easy-access dayhike

Even though Big Horn Canyon is just 10 miles outside the town of Escalante, it remains surprisingly quiet: "Everyone's in a hurry to go way the heck out to Coyote Gulch, and they drive right by the canyons near town," Green says. The few who do explore the twisty, redrock canyon's sandstone towers and narrows enter on the north end, but Green prefers the "top-secret entrance": From the unmarked trailhead (just past a corral about 5 miles down Hole-in-the-Rock Road), follow Harris Wash 2 miles to join Big Horn Canyon to the north. Enter Big Horn and take the first fork on your right to snake through a rust-colored slot canyon and reach an open sandstone basin swirled with reds and oranges. Continue exploring up the main fork of Big Horn Canyon as the walls stretch 150 feet above you, then retrace your steps for a 6- to 8-mile hike (depending on how far up you go).

2. Best multiday trip

Looking for the classic Escalante experience—but not in the mood to share? Head for the under-the-radar Upper Paria River area on Green's favorite 33-mile, four-day shuttle hike down a deep (500 feet in spots), sculpted sandstone canyon packed with opportunities for exploring side gorges. "It's wide like the Grand Canyon in some places, there are giant ponderosa pines and cottonwoods to camp under, and if you have a keen eye, there's rock art the length of this hike," Green says. From the pullout off Cottonwood Canyon Road (37.511042, -112.033900), descend along the Paria Wash to the Sheep Creek confluence at about mile 10. Day two, hike 5 miles to Deer Creek and set up camp, then explore Deer Creek and West Oak Creek Canyons just downstream. Day three takes you 8 miles to Hogeve Canyon, another worthy side trip (and your last reliable water). Finish with a 10-mile hike to your shuttle car on Cottonwood Canyon Road (37.227822, -111.928922). Target May or early fall for the best conditions and pack a 50-foot handline for navigating the scrambly bits in some side canyons (free permit required; pick up at Cannonville Visitor Center).

3. Top basecamp

The sandy, cottonwood-shaded campsite at the confluence of the Escalante River and Death Hollow tops Green's list for its nearby swimming holes (1.5 miles up Death Hollow Canyon), soaring canyon walls, and abundant rock art. But now it's better than ever, thanks to extensive volunteer work over the past couple of years that has cleared the canyon of its overgrowth of invasive tamarisk and Russian olive. To get there, follow the

Escalante River 7 miles upstream from the Escalante River trailhead, passing a natural rock bridge and panels of pictographs and petroglyphs on the south-facing canyon walls, to heavenly camping at the mouth of Death Hollow (free, self-issue permit required).

4. Secret car campground

Calf Creek Campground, between Boulder and Escalante on US 12, draws campers like flies to honey for its rich red canyon walls, desert spring, and proximity to 126-foot-tall Calf Creek Falls. But just down the road, Deer Creek Campground offers similar highlights "with 2 percent of the people," Green says. From your tent, hike down Deer Creek Canyon for rock art and trout fishing—but no waterfalls. Best bet: Take a dip in Calf Creek Falls, then hightail it to Deer Creek (\$10/night).

5. Slot canyons

Visiting Escalante without wiggling through a few tight spots is like going to Yellowstone and skipping the geysers. For beginners, Green recommends the 5-miler connecting Peek-a-Boo and Spooky Gulches: "They give everyone a chance to climb and squeeze through classic, twisting slots." From the Dry Fork trailhead, spider through Peek-a-Boo, then hike .5 mile east across the desert to join narrower Spooky (no permit needed for day trips).

6. Post-trip refueling

"Easy choice: Escalante Outfitters," Green says. The guide company/gear shop/restaurant in Escalante serves up tasty pizza (try the ham-and-goat-cheese Big Horn) and local microbrews, including their own, Vagabond Ale. "The maps and cool vibe there make it the place to hang out."

Trip Planner

Season March to May and September to November **Permit** Required (free) for backpacking **Contact** bit.do/escalante-blm

3

Find the coolest trophy you can't have.

Mature bull elk (common in the Rockies and western U.S.) shed their antlers mid-March. Note: You shouldn't collect the 2- to 4-foot, branched horns (LNT!), but that doesn't diminish the thrill of finding them. A good bet: the high-elevation grasslands of Yellowstone, home to some 10,000 to 20,000 elk. Try the 7.7-mile Garnet Hill Loop.

4

ESCAPE TO PARADISE.

There's no off-season in Southern California, so you could knock off the 3-mile loop to 70-foot Paradise Falls any time of year. But go now for a better chance at solitude (it's just 45 minutes northwest of Los Angeles). Connect the Moonridge and Indian Creek Trails in Wildwood Regional Park to see the gusher, which spills into a jade pool. We like to think of it as a poor man's Havasu Falls. **Contact** bit.do/wildwood-park



5

Go green.
Hoh Rain Forest, Olympic
National Park, Washington

You don't need to go all the way to New Zealand to find *Lord of the Rings* scenery. With more than 150 inches of rain annually, the Hoh would seem a mythical destination any time of year. But come March, this temperate rainforest truly comes alive. Moss and ferns decorate nearly every surface, smothering hundred-foot sitka spruces and red cedars and providing a backdrop that seems almost as enchanted as its inhabitants, which include tree frogs, banana slugs, bobcats, cougars, black bears, and Roosevelt elk. To get there, photographer Garret Suhrie hopped on the 16-mile Hoh River Trail, which meanders all the way to Glacier Meadows. He found this grove about 10 miles in. There are plenty of campsites along the trail, including some great low-impact spots on gravel bars along the Hoh River (first-come, first-serve; permit required). Contact nps.gov/olymp

**6**

**Fall in love.
Glory Hole, Ozark
National Forest,
Arkansas**

Horsetail waterfalls, tunnel waterfalls, multitiered waterfalls, tidefalls—and now you can add “vortex erosion waterfall” to the list of impressive types of cascades. The only known waterfall of its kind in the U.S., Glory Hole formed when an obstacle blocked the creek’s route, forcing a “hydrological vortex.” In other words, the water eventually eroded through the roof of a limestone bluff like a drill. The 2-mile out-and-back to visit Glory Hole is popular in summer, so go now (you may even be lucky enough to see it frozen over in midair, says photographer Beau Rogers). Find the unmarked trailhead off AR 16/21 between Fallsville and Swain (about 35.828513, -93.390564). Contact bit.do/glory-hole

7

THE EXPERIENCE



Channel the snail, or just notice more of them, by slowing your pace way down.

PHOTOS BY (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) PATITUCCIPHOTO / AURORA PHOTOS; JEFF WENDORFF;
COURTESY OF MACGILLIVRAY FREEMAN FILMS

Take it Easy: Slow Hiking

Abandon the breakneck pace and you'll have the ultimate argument for quality over quantity. BY ETHAN SHAW

→ **FRESH OUT OF THE RAGGED CHUTE** of the White River Canyon in the northern Oregon Cascades, my wife and I have come to where the Timberline Trail—the 40-mile circumambulation of Mt. Hood—converges with the Pacific Crest Trail. It being early September, scores of skinny thru-hikers pass us at their grim clip. To them it must seem like we're standing still. They wouldn't be exactly wrong.

Often, we are standing still. It's the only way to appreciate the finer points of this—or any—terrain. Released from the usual meditation-inducing rhythm of fast-paced hiking, our minds stay more present, our senses sharpen. Simply put, we see much, much more—even on a stretch of trail we've hoofed along countless times.

Easily distracted by gnarled trees, animal tracks, and enigmatic outcrops, I'm an inveterate stop-and-start hiker to begin with. This morning, though, we're trying something a tad more extreme: dedicating five hours to a single mile of thoroughly familiar, thoroughly well-trodden trail, giving it some loving, down-on-hands-and-knees attention.

Ambling through beargrass parkland amid the sharp cries of flickers, we ease toward a dense tree island of mountain hemlock edging the White River Canyon's scarp. A thicket of mountain-ash near the grove compels me to take a closer look: I kneel and peer into the twisty depths and discover a miniature jungle flitting with juncos. A few yards beyond, I inspect the innards of the hemlock stand, pushing aside soft boughs and gazing into the pool of darkness within.

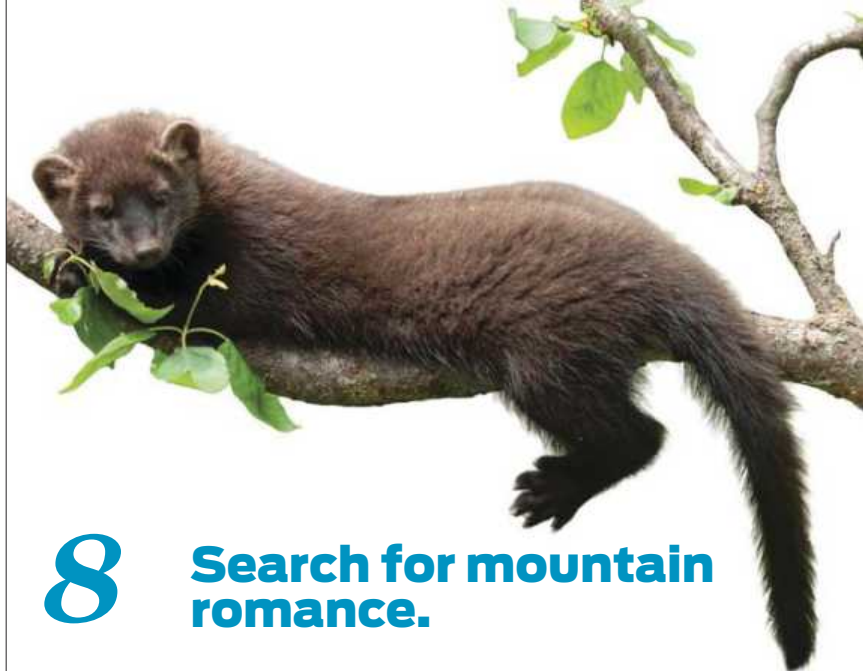
All around in the bright ash barrens, upslope breezes are buffeting the faded aster and goldenrod blooms—but here in the belly of this timberline copse, it's still and black. In this heavy silence, I suddenly hear the clatter of rocks from within the gray ravines below: The meltwater debris flowing off the White River Glacier in recent weeks is still settling. The volcano is shifting its bones a little. I back out of the hemlocks.

In the face of such common miracles, boredom turns out to be a non-issue even on the most syrupy of slow-hikes. More pronounced is the nagging urgency that surely you should be doing something else, surely you should be hastening onward to those clamoring undone tasks of the real world. Put a little pep in your step and seize the day, rather than wait for it to reveal itself.

But we ignore such neurotic impulses. This here—this jagged snag, this lame-winged raven—this *is* the real world. And deep, hyperaware immersion in landscape is a time-honored human pastime: That's how we learned the geographies of animals, fruiting groves, and water sources; that's how we came to know a place "like the back of our hand."

Timberline Lodge, our modest destination, inches closer. After spooking a black-tailed doe and her three fawns, we drop into a shallow gulch that cups the glacier-fed trickle of the Salmon River. I think of the wild course this cold, gritty water will take: across soggy subalpine meadows, down back-of-beyond waterfalls in a roadless gorge, rolling through terraced rainforest to its confluence with the Sandy.

We haven't gained any time by slowing things down, but it seems we've made the moments richer, more detailed, more full. Perhaps the subtlest secrets of the world unfold only for the slow. It's something I'll think about next time we're out, moseying around a familiar mountain. No rush. ■



8

Search for mountain romance.

The fisher's version of "Netflix and chill" comes to the coniferous forests in the Sierra this month. From late February through early April, the usually solitary, marten-like bachelors and bachelorettes abandon their nocturnal tendencies to find a mate. They're still elusive, but now's the best time to catch them skittering about the forest floor and foraging around fallen trees (most active at dusk). Look for them on a trail that's worth your time, evasive weasels notwithstanding, just in case. We like linking the Eagle Lake and Granite Lake Trails into a 6.2-miler in Desolation Wilderness (super-easy access off CA 89), but come prepared for snow. Get beta at backpacker.com/granite-eagle-lake-loop.

No. 9

Visit a national park, kinda.

No permits? No problem. Head to your local IMAX theater and catch *National Parks Adventure*, which premieres February 12. The flick, which Robert Redford narrates, takes viewers to Yosemite, Redwood, Glacier (with pro climber Conrad Anker), and more. Info nationalparksadventure.com

Actors portray John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt in front of Half Dome in *National Parks Adventure*.







10

See the light.
Black Balsam Knob,
Shining Rock Wilderness,
North Carolina

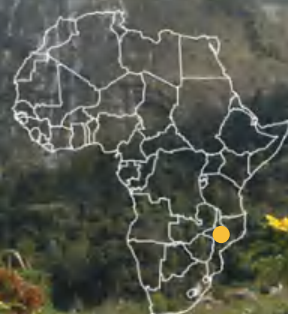
With spring just around the corner, it's time to start planning your return to the southern Appalachians. The grassy balds are restored to their viridescence, the pink phlox is blooming, and, here atop 6,214-foot Black Balsam Knob, the view-to-work ratio is top-notch. To get there, photographer Sean Coldren hopped on the Art Loeb Trail from the Black Balsam trailhead and ascended just .5 mile through fragrant balsam firs to the summit (scan east to see 6,050-foot Sam Knob, pictured). You could retrace your steps, but we recommend continuing on a tour de Appalachia, of sorts: Head about 6 more miles north on section three of the Art Loeb Trail across several mountain balds, including 6,040-foot Shining Rock, to Deep Gap. (Turn it into an overnight by camping at Investor Gap near the midway point.) **Contact** bit.do/shining-rock-wild

Peakbagging in the Rift Valley

Explore Malawi's undiscovered Mulanje Massif, with summits for every level. BY MAJKA BURHARDT

LIFE LIST

11



East face of Chambe Peak

→ **I STAND IN THE SUN** on my first Malawian summit just as the midafternoon shadows begin to creep across the granite folds that led me to the top of 8,390-foot Chambe Peak. My quads burn from scrambling up a few thousand feet of low-angle slabs. Before me, the overlapping rock ridges, rainforests, and summits of southeastern Africa's Mulanje Massif spread out to the horizon, and I think: *One down, 61 to go.*

I didn't see Mulanje on my first visit here in 2011. I'd driven below the cloud-covered mountain and had no idea that a range of peaks stretched through the Rift Valley, like the Tetons were multiplied and transported to Africa. But I glimpsed a skirt of granite that swept up from the green plateau and into the mist, and I knew I had to come back.

I'm glad I had the luck to see through the clouds because Mulanje is a hiker's paradise. The route that caught my attention: a 16-mile out-and-back to the top of Chambe. The four-day trip links rainforests to granite ridges to an optional thousand-foot technical ascent, all based out of a remote backcountry hut at 6,100 feet.

We start our hike on a May day at the Likhubula Forestry Station, where we meet our guide, Edwin Petanei, who grew up on the flanks of the massif. We set out under the midday sun and trace the Skyline Trail as it gently ascends 5 miles to a forested shoulder and the Chambe Hut, a spacious shelter with a porch overlooking the peak's southeast face.

Next day, half of our group hikes 3 miles up the granite shoulder, which provides a

near-constant vista of the sawtoothed cirque, while two of us tackle a thousand-foot route up a vegetation-choked chimney.

We meet atop Chambe, where Edwin points out his favorite summits, like Kuto, Dzole, Namasile, and Sapitwa, the massif's 9,849-foot high point whose name translates from the local Chichewa language to "don't go." I point to a pyramid formation and Edwin tells me it's not even a proper peak by Mulanje's definition. Still, I include it on my personal list of Mulanje objectives: 61 just became 62.

DO IT Fly into Blantyre. For \$150, book huts and hire guides and porters at the InfoMulanje office in Chitakale (or do it beforehand at infomulanje@sdn.org.mw). **Season** March to November **Info** Mountain Club of Malawi (mcm.org.mw)



THE GOOD FIGHT

The Susitna River, which wends its way 313 miles from Denali to Anchorage, provides some of the country's best salmon fishing, as well as scenery for some of its best hikes (try the 1.5-mile McKinley Overlook Trail). Now under threat from a possible 735-foot dam, the Alaska waterway—and its host of river-basin wildlife, like salmon, caribou, moose, brown and black bears, cranes, and swans—needs recognition as a National Recreational River. To help, visit susitnarivercoalition.org.

DONE IN A DAY

13

Hike Back In Time

Take these close-to-home paths to ancient fossils. **BY KRISTEN POPE**

Calvert Cliffs
Beach Trail,
Calvert Cliffs
State Park

MARYLAND

Petrified remains of more than 600 species (up to 20 million years old) have been unearthed at this East Coast fossil hot spot. Amateur paleontologists can ID the whale vertebrae that litter the area; searchers have found bones from more than 20 kinds of marine mammals, from sperm whales to short-beaked porpoises. To find some for yourself, take the Red Trail 3.6 miles out and back to the beach and cliff area on Chesapeake Bay. The 100-foot-tall cliffs hide Miocene era (20 to 10 million years ago) fossils, including chesapecten (scallops), ecphora (mollusks), shark teeth, and ancient oyster shells. Bring sieves and shovels to dig in the sand for fossils to take home—low tide after a storm is the best time for collecting (yes, you're allowed). **Contact** bit.do/calvert-cliffs

Dinosaur
Ridge Trail,
Morrison-Golden
Fossil Area

COLORADO

Take the "dinosaur freeway" 2 miles out and back to peek into a literal Jurassic park: See 150-million-year-old dinosaur tracks and bones, as well as the ripple marks left by ancient waves in the sandstone and mudstone. From the Visitor Center, pick up the Dinosaur Ridge Trail and walk past 17 fossil sites (described with interpretive signs). More than 300 dinosaur footprints

have been identified in this area; don't miss the "Bronto Bulges" near mile .8. These "outie" tracks are 3D impressions, or natural casts, of the print. Turn around near the Dinosaur Bone Quarry, where the world's first stegosaurus was discovered (see some of its bones at the nearby Morrison Natural History Museum). Continue to the Discovery Center or turn around here. No collecting allowed. **Contact** dinoridge.org

Petrified Forest
Loop, Theodore
Roosevelt
National Park

NORTH DAKOTA

More than 55 million years ago, today's arid badlands of North Dakota were a subtropical swamp teeming with crocodiles, turtles, freshwater clams, and other aquatic creatures. Paleontologists have discovered more than 200 fossil sites in the park, but the most visible remnant of ancient times are massive fields of fossilized trees, mainly bald cypress and sequoia. See for yourself on the 10.3-mile

Petrified Forest Loop, which starts from the western trailhead. Hike northeast and see petrified wood en masse at miles .5, 1.5, and 2 before linking with the Maah Daah Hey Trail (great views of the Little Missouri River here). Split onto the South Petrified Forest Trail (find a rare whole petrified log near the trail at mile 8.5) to circle back to the trailhead. No collecting allowed. **Contact** nps.gov/thro



No. 14

Notch your first postwinter overnight.

NO.
15

**And maybe
come back
with a great
story.**

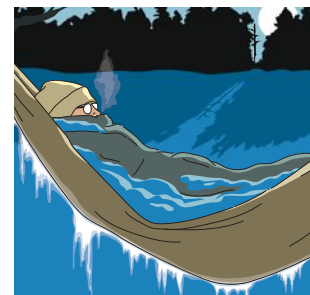
A little too eager? We asked our readers to share their early-season foibles. Plan ahead to avoid predicaments like these. (New Hampshire hikers, plan way ahead.)



Mac Murphy, 23
Mt. Isolation, NH, in May
"... We ended up stuck in knee-deep powder in an incredibly tight coniferous forest. The fastest option was to swing through the trees above the snow."



Philip Hinckley, 31
Mt. Lafayette, NH, in April
"... Groupthink kept us moving ahead through 3 feet of snow. When darkness fell, my buddy had to sidle into my bag with me so we wouldn't freeze."



Ryan Horikoshi, 41
Kern River, CA, in March
"... I brought a hammock instead of a tent to save weight. Wore all of my clothes to bed every night and woke up with ice on my bag every morning."

WEEKENDS
16
1 of 3

OLDEST MAINTAINED
FOOT TRAIL IN THE U.S.
(SINCE 1819)
The Crawford Path



SECOND-HIGHEST WIND
SPEED EVER RECORDED
(OCCURRED ON APRIL 12, 1934)
231 mph

ANNUAL AVERAGE
SUMMIT WIND SPEED
35 mph

DEATHS

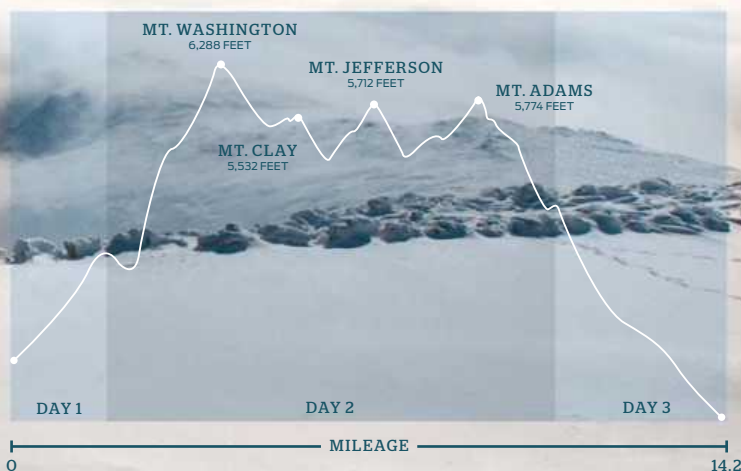
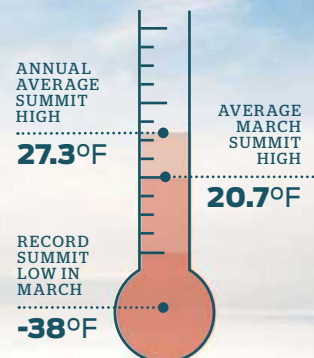
TOTAL **140** BY AVY **10**
SINCE 1849 SINCE 1954



ANNUAL AVERAGE SNOWFALL
23.4 ft



TEMPERATURES

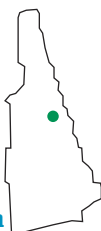


East Coast Alps

White Mountain National Forest,
New Hampshire

The big windows around the table where we're eating are frosted over, revealing just a hazy silhouette of a golden peak beneath the setting sun. It looks oddly placid—given that just a few hours ago, I braced myself against 30 mph winds atop 6,288-foot Mt. Washington, the Northeast's high point and a location infamous for having the world's worst weather. "Good" conditions for this three-day, 14-mile ridgewalk across Big Wash and Mts. Clay, Jefferson, and Adams are relative; but if you brave the gales, whiteouts, and frigid temps, it can feel like the poor man's traverse of the Alps. But like a true Alps trek, brutal conditions come with luxe accommodations. We bed down first in Harvard Cabin and then tonight at Crag Camp, the Randolph Mountain Club's regally located wood cabin at 4,200 feet in the shadow of Adams. I can see my breath crystallize in the cone of my headlamp, but the clouds blasting across the ridgeline outside remind me that we have it pretty good.

BY RYAN WICHELNS



Turn-by-turn From Pinkham Notch

- 1 Climb 2.1 miles west on **Tuckerman Ravine Trail** to its junction with the **Raymond Path**. (Boots with sturdy soles should be sufficient below treeline.)
- 2 Continue .2 mile north to Harvard Cabin.
- 3 Retrace your steps .2 mile and pick up the winter standard route on **Lion Head Trail**, which climbs 1.9 miles up Mt. Washington. (Strap on crampons above treeline.)
- 4 Pick up the **Gulfside Trail** and head 4.7 miles north off the summit to Thunderstorm Junction (bag Clay at mile 5.6 and Jefferson at mile 7.1).
- 5 Tack on a .6-mile out-and-back to summit New Hampshire's second-tallest peak, 5,774-foot Mt. Adams,

before dropping down the mountain's north shoulder to Crag Camp at mile 10.5 via the **Spur Trail**.
6 Link the **Randolph Path** and **Short Line** 3.5 miles north to your shuttle car at Appalachia.



Campsite 1 Harvard Cabin (mile 2)

Open between December 1 and April 1, this cabin (above, right) is a hub for Huntington Ravine's climbers and skiers, but makes a cozy shelter for anyone braving Mt. Washington. Weather reports are radioed in from the summit station every morning, while a woodstove keeps the 16-person shelter toasty. Take a 10-minute walk uphill for panoramic views of Hunt's gullies. To



Harvard Cabin

reserve the Harvard Mountaineering Club shelter, sign in at Pinkham Notch before you head up (\$15/person; harvardmountaineering.org).



Campsite 2 Crag Camp (mile 10.5)

The Appalachian Mountain Club huts that link the Presidential Traverse and beyond shut down in winter, leaving smaller groups like the Randolph Mountain Club to take up the slack. But that's OK because the view from Crag Camp south across King Ravine to Mts. Adams and Madison is top-notch (and much cheaper). The unheated shelter (\$20/person; first-come, first-serve; pay at the cabin) can sleep up to 20 year-round.



Weather

Conditions on Mt. Washington are spicy, to say the least. Always check weather beforehand at bit.do/mtwash-weather; for a safe trip, target winds less than 50 mph. If conditions turn when you're above treeline, retreat (preferred) or follow cairns to the bunker-like observatory buildings at the summit. Crampons and an ice axe are recommended.



Spring skiing

Haul your skis if you have avalanche know-how: Save hours, literally, by cruising the ridges between peaks and down King Ravine from Crag Camp. Bonus: Tuckerman Ravine, the East's classic backcountry skiing objective, is less than a mile from Harvard Cabin.

DO IT Shuttle car 44.371447, -71.289296; 6 miles west of Gorham on Route 2 **Trailhead** 44.257310, -71.253161; 17 miles south of shuttle car at Pinkham Notch **Season** December to April for a wintry ascent **Permits** None **Custom map** bit.do/BPmapMtWash (\$15) **Contact** fs.usda.gov/whitemountain **Trip data** backpacker.com/mtwash-in-winter

Trip stats

Distance: 14.2 miles (point to point)
Time: 3 days
Difficulty: ★★★★★

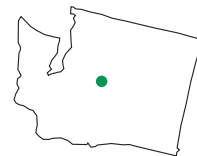
WEEKENDS

17

2 of 3

Early Season in the High Desert

Wenas
Wildlife Area,
Washington



I wake to the smell of sage and unzip my tent, which is perched high on a ridge facing the Cascades. Sunshine paints the snowy domes of Rainier and Adams pale pink; due south, I can just make out the pyramid of Hood. But while those peaks are still cloaked in snow, I'm awash in spring color. Purple spikes of lupine and golden bursts of arrowleaf balsamroot peek above a white carpet of phlox. It will be at least three more months before hiking season really kicks off in the Cascades, but here in the desert, spring is bringing its best act. BY PAUL CHISHOLM



Turn-by-turn From the Umtanum Creek Recreation Area

- ① Cross the Yakima River via a bridge to a fork.
- ② Pick up the Umtanum Creek Trail and head upcanyon to a grassy slope at mile 2.5.
- ③ Turn south and follow a switchbacking game trail 1.3 miles to an old road. (This route uses a jigsaw of decommissioned roads that are so overgrown, they feel like double-wide trails.)
- ④ Take the road south to a junction on Umtanum Ridge at mile 4.4.
- ⑤ Follow the Skyline Trail a mile east to a spur.
- ⑥ Veer south .2 mile to the campsite.
- ⑦ Continue southeast on the Skyline Trail to a junction at mile 8.4.
- ⑧ Take the east option onto another old road that plunges 1,600 feet in .8 mile to the rim of the Yakima

River Canyon before meandering 4.3 miles along the rim to a fork at mile 13.5.

⑨ Head .8 mile north on the Umtanum Ridge Trail to your car.



Campsite Umtanum Ridge (mile 5.7)

Secure tent-door views of the Cascades and the green Wenas Valley on this grassy knoll at 3,400 feet. The first-come, first-serve site is dry, so fill up water at Umtanum Creek en route.



Geology

Umtanum Ridge is part of the Saddle Mountains, a basalt uplift that extends east across central Washington from the Cascades. Normally a geologic disturbance of this kind would displace local rivers, but the excavating activity of the Yakima River kept pace with

the uplift, resulting in the 1,000-foot-deep Yakima River Canyon.



Wildlife

From December to April, look for overwintering mammals, like elk and bighorn sheep, bedding down among the canyon's cottonwoods.

DO IT Trailhead 46.855378, -120.483241; 14 miles south of Ellensburg off SR-821 **Season** Year-round, though winter may bring a dusting of snow at the higher elevations. **Permits** None **Custom map** bit.do/BPmapUmtanum (\$15) **Contact** bit.do/WenasWildlifeArea **Trip data** backpacker.com/umtanum

Trip stats

Distance: 14.3 miles (loop)
Time: 2 days
Difficulty: ★★☆☆☆

NO.

18

Go offline.

Google Maps' new offline option lets you download your trip itinerary ahead of time and use it when you're off the grid (in addition to paper maps and a compass). There is still no app for being unprepared.

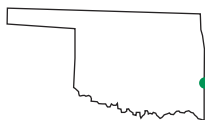





Snow blankets many of the country's wilds in March, but here in the Ouachitas, I trek through a different kind of white: trillium. I navigate around moss-covered boulders and past pockets of springtime blooms en route to Winding Stair Mountain, where I hit sensory overload. Ribbons of purple geranium and yellow violet decorate forested hills under a cloudless sky. Not bad for the first overnight of the season. BY ERICA ZAZO

First Flowers

Ouachita National Forest,
Oklahoma



Turn-by-turn
From Cedar Lake

- ① Pick up the **Horsethief Springs Trail** and head 2.1 miles south.
- ② Take its west fork (flip the loop clockwise for a shorter first day) and continue south to a T-junction at mile 5.3.
- ③ Take the **Ouachita National Recreation Trail** 1.4 miles east across Winding Stair Mountain to a fork (pass the hike's namesake spring near mile 6.6).
- ④ Hook up with the Horsethief Springs Trail again and descend to camp  at mile 7.
- ⑤ Continue 3.7 miles north to close the loop (cross Cedar Creek at miles 8.8 and 10.2; it can be ankle-deep in March).
- ⑥ Retrace your steps 2.1 miles to your car.



Campsite
Limestone bluff (mile 7)

To camp near the midway point, park it in this pine-protected social site just west (hiker's left) of the switchbacks off Winding Stair Mountain on the backend of the loop. Seasonal streams run near the trail, but top up at Horsethief Springs, the most reliable water on the route, .4 mile back. If the bluff is claimed, continue 1.7 miles to the spots near Cedar Creek.




Flora

Scan for March blooms like green trillium, purple wild geranium (pictured), and yellow violets growing trailside. By early summer, sunflowers, like asters and black-eyed Susans, hit their prime.



PHOTOS BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM




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Horse thieves

In the post-Civil War 1800s, outlaws—including Jesse James and the Daltons—would hide out near the natural spring on Winding Stair Mountain and ambush passing travelers.

DO IT Trailhead

34.778854, -94.692436; 18 miles north of Big Cedar on Cedar Lake Rd. **Season** Year-round **Permit** Self-issue (\$3/day) **Custom map** bit.ly/BPmapHorseThief (\$15) **Contact** fs.usda.gov/ouachita **Trip data** backpacker.com/horsethiefspring

Trip stats

Distance: 12.8 miles (lollipop loop)
Time: 2 days
Difficulty: ★★☆☆



20

HARNESS EL NIÑO.

If forecasters are right, winter precip is coming to the super-parched West. Early indications (skiing in California before Thanksgiving!) suggest they're right. Here's what El Niño means for you:

PCT HIKERS

Expect to encounter challenging snow in the Sierra. But hey, Cheryl Strayed skipped those sections and look where that landed her.

DESERT RATS

Dial in your camera's color settings—it should be a “super-bloom” year in Death Valley, Joshua Tree, Anza-Borrego (pictured), and other southern hot spots.

SKIERS

It's the year to tally 50 days! Usually El Niño means lots of snow in the southern U.S., but this year, it means lots of snow everywhere in the West (ask a meteorologist).

REACH FOR NEW HEIGHTS

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Skills

Glissade

Forget downclimbing—slightly wet spring snow is perfect for sliding. Glissade safely with these tips from Colorado Mountain Club instructor Rick Casey.

1. Check conditions. Dense, settled snow is ideal. Dig your axe into the snow to test for ice. If there's noticeable ice underneath, you won't be able to stop or steer well and could end up tumbling instead of glissading. **2. Scope your route.** If you can't see the bottom of the slope, don't attempt a glissade. There could be drop-offs out of view. **3. Remove excess gear.** Waterproof pants are optimal. (On low-angle slopes, boost speed by climbing into a bivy sack, pictured.) Gear like crampons and harnesses can easily catch on things, so stow them in your pack. **4. Position your body.** Sit upright, knees bent, and don't lean forward. **5. Ready your ice axe.** "It acts as a rudder to moderate speed and steer," Casey says. Grip the axe just under the blade with the adze pointing backward and position it beside your hip. You'll drag the spike in the snow to brake and weight turns. **6. Go.** With the axe locked at your side, push off and let your butt do the work. **7. Stop.** Pressure the axe and your heels into the snow. If you find yourself unable to stop, self-arrest by rolling over on your stomach and thrusting the pick of the axe into the snow (don't attempt to glissade until you can confidently self-arrest).



The fun and fast way
down Mt. Hood

Hiker on the Move

Walk and shoot to freeze your subject while the scenery rushes past.
By Photo Editor Genny Fullerton

SPOT DEATH CANYON,
GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

SPECS F/4.0, 1/30, ISO 100
24MM FOCAL LENGTH

 AIDAN KLIMENKO

1

PICK A GOOD LOCATION

You'll get the best results by trying this technique in an area with bushes, wildflowers, or trees surrounding the trail at waist height or above. These supporting features need to be close to the camera for the motion blur to look good.

2

ADJUST YOUR SETTINGS

Use continuous shooting or burst mode to avoid unnecessary camera shake. Also look for continuous autofocus mode (some brands call this "servo autofocus"). This will help the camera stay focused as you move. Best target: The hiker's pack or body (not arms or legs).

3

SET YOUR SHUTTER SPEED

You want the shutter open long enough to expose the sensor to perceptible motion, but short enough that you can lock onto your subject and freeze him or her. Between 1/30 and 1/10 second is a good bet for matching speeds with a hiker.

4

WALK AS YOU SHOOT

Hold the camera steady and match your pace to your subject's. It's easiest to keep her sharp if you frame her in the center. Use live view mode; this will free your eyes to watch the framing and where you're walking.

5

REVIEW AND REPEAT

Take a few sets of photos, then review to see if shutter speed, hiking pace, or composition need adjusting. Even after you've learned the technique, it normally takes multiple tries to get a shot with a good balance of blur and sharpness.



YOUR SHOOT-BETTER FIELD GUIDE You got a new camera for Christmas. Great, now go beyond auto mode. Learn additional advanced techniques in our new pocket-size book, *Adventure Photography*. Longtime pro Dan Bailey shares his tips from 25 years of experience shooting adventures all over the world. You'll learn how to carry and protect your camera gear, deal with harsh conditions, find the best light, improve your composition, shoot at night, master basic editing, and more. \$15; backpacker.com/adventurephoto

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Make Your Gear Last

Gear Editor Kristin Hostetter literally wrote the book on maintaining gear (*BACKPACKER's Complete Guide to Outdoor Gear Maintenance and Repair*, \$20; amazon.com). Follow her tips for ensuring your gear won't quit, ever.

SLICK YOUR ZIPPERS

Keep zippers on tents, packs, bags, and shells from failing. Remove visible debris with a dry toothbrush, then apply liquid lubricant (such as McNett Zip Care; \$5) to both sides. Run the zipper a few times to work in the lube.

Clean liquid-fuel stoves before each season. Learn how at backpacker.com/liquidfuel.

CONDITION LEATHER BOOTS

Don't let leather dry out and crack. Apply several thin coats of a conditioner (we like Aquaseal, \$8, because it waterproofs as well) to room-temperature boots with your fingers. Rub it in everywhere, including the seams.

CLEAN YOUR PACK

Prevent animals from snacking on last year's crumbs. Remove grit with a vacuum, then mix warm water with a squirt of mild dish soap and use a plastic-bristled brush to scrub the pack. Rinse with a garden hose and let it air dry.

REPLACE WORN POLE TIPS

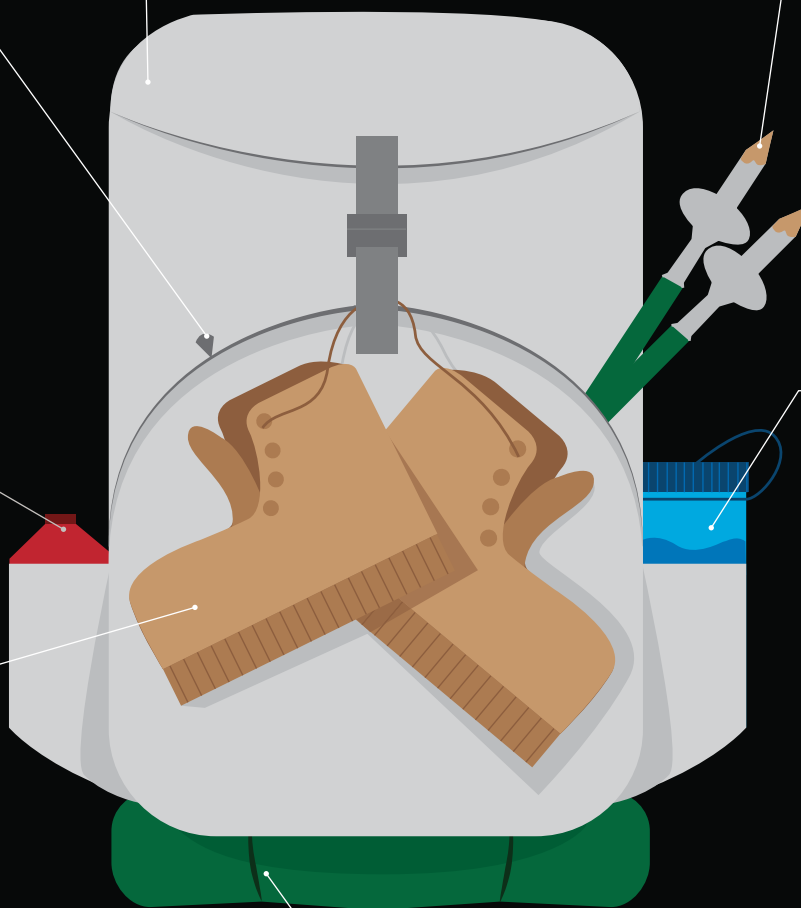
Some tips will easily come off with pliers. If that's not the case, heat up the joint in boiling water and pull the tip free. Apply hot-melt craft glue to the new tip and reinstall.

DE-FUNK YOUR WATER BOTTLES

Remove musty smells and tastes with a simple solution: the juice of one lemon, three tablespoons white vinegar, and three tablespoons baking soda. Fill to top with warm water. After soaking overnight, run through the dishwasher.

PATCH YOUR PAD

Prevent small holes from growing into a bad night's sleep. Remove the backer of a round adhesive patch. Mix a dollop of Seam Grip and a few drops of water using the backer as a palette. Apply the mixture to the tear, then firmly press on the patch. Weight it with a heavy rock, then let it cure for 24 hours.





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Quickly fills any holes or tears

ALCOHOL PREP PADS

Clean fabric before repairs

MULTITOOL

Pliers are a must

TEAR-AID TYPE A (\$10; amazon.com)

Patches holes in most fabrics

PREP YOUR TENT

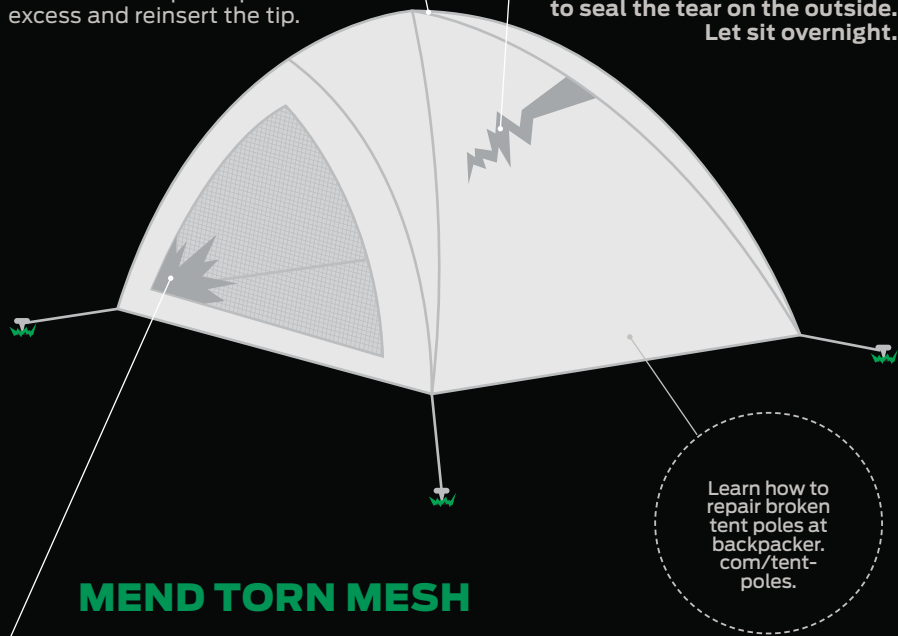
Examine seams for any potential leaks caused by peeling or deteriorating tape. The fix: Pitch your tent so seams are tight, with the fly inside out. Paint a thin coat of sealer (like Seam Grip) on problem areas; use the included brush and pay extra attention to corners. Dry thoroughly before packing. Tip: If the tape is in really rough shape, you need to peel it off altogether, scour and clean off glue residue, then seal seams.

REPLACE SHOCK CORDS

Your tent's only as sturdy as its poles. If your poles feel loose when assembled, it's time to replace the shock cord. Remove the pole tip from one end and untie the cord, knotting it with the new cord for easy pull-through. Knot the new one onto the other pole tip. Trim off excess and reinsert the tip.

REPAIR FABRIC TEARS

Peel off the duct tape and make a permanent fix. Iron the fabric until smooth, then place a patch of Tear-Aid over the inside of the tear—with at least ½ inch on each side—and smooth out air bubbles. Use SilNet (for siliconized nylon) or Seam Grip (for polyurethane-coated nylon) to seal the tear on the outside. Let sit overnight.



MEND TORN MESH

The Gear Aid Bug Mesh Patch Kit (\$6; mcnett.com) will quickly, easily, and permanently fix all mesh holes smaller than 3 inches across. A ring of Tenacious Tape keeps the precut, round patches in place.

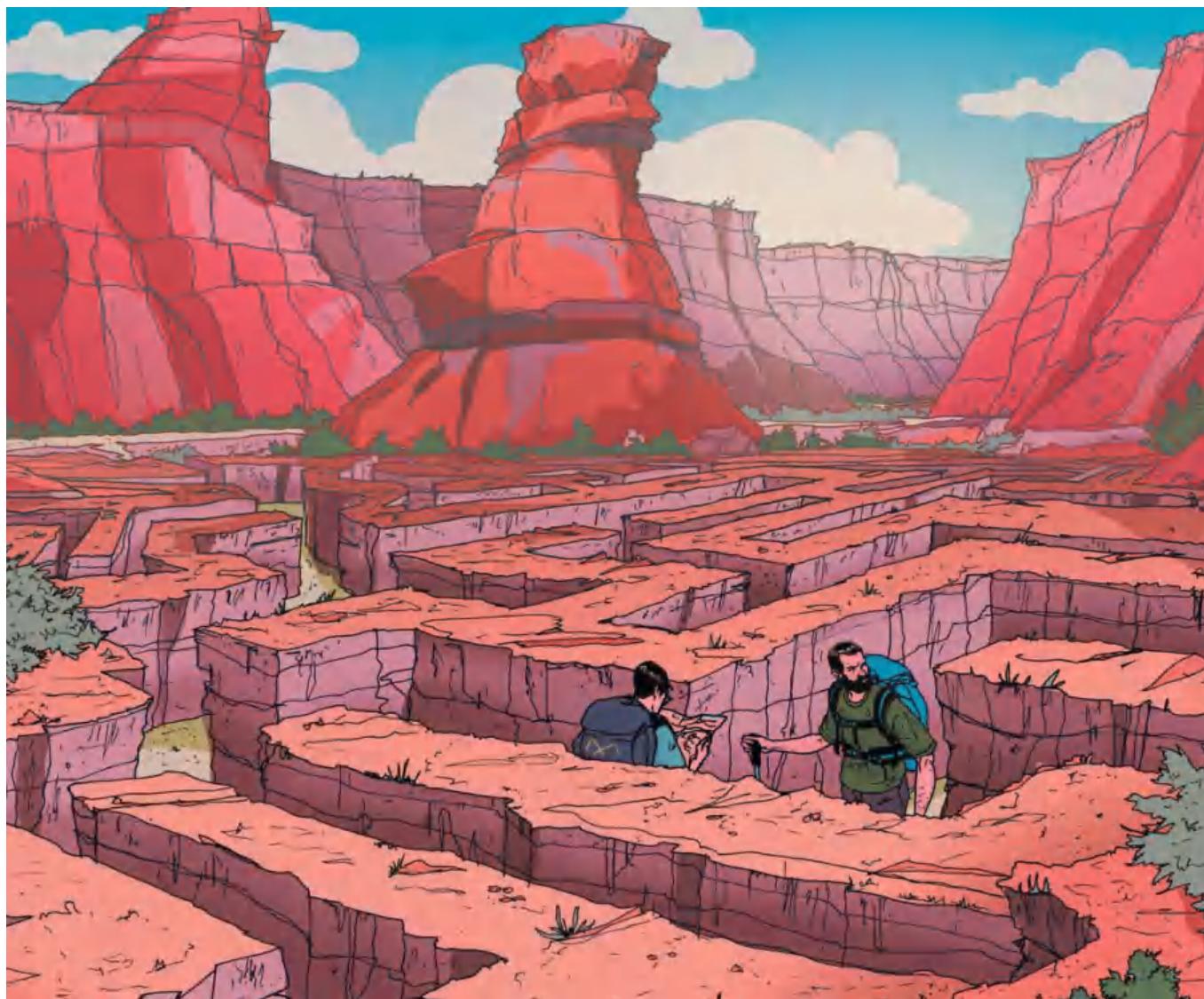
Learn how to repair broken tent poles at backpacker.com/tent-poles.



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THE CHALLENGE

Get Unlost

After losing the trail, can this wayward hiker find her way back? By Elisabeth Kwak-Hefferan

Getting lost in the desert is never an attractive proposition. But it's especially unwelcome in February, when the warm days turn suddenly to chilling nights, the light jacket you're wearing is already feeling too thin, and your trail mix is down to just a few raisins.

That's exactly the situation I found myself in during

a dayhike gone awry in Canyonlands National Park. A boyfriend and I had set off to hike an 8-mile loop in sunny, perfect 50°F hiking weather. Right before we left the parking lot, I tossed my poofy down parka back in the car—surely, it was overkill on a day trip. We'd be back in Moab for dinner.

But just a few hours later,

we stood facing each other, alternating uneasy glances at the GPS in his hand and the sage-stubbed cliff walls around us. We'd lost the trail in a sandy wash three-fourths of the way through the loop. After 30 minutes of scouting, squinting at the map, and backtracking, we'd made zero progress. There was no denying it: We were really lost.

It was a predicament I'd always worried about but never experienced. But there I was, off-track in the wild and facing exactly that challenge.

I knew what you're supposed to do: Return to your last known location. Get back on the established trail. Backtrack if you can or, failing that, stay put so you don't make things worse. Under no circumstances should you go

bombing around off-trail.

But now I learned what you *really* do: panic. Even with all that common sense running through my brain, a deeper instinct pulled me forward, not back. *The right path must be close. Just keep moving. Hurry. It'll be fine.* I looked at the darkening sky and could almost feel the snowflakes crystallizing in my cells.

Behind us stretched 6 miles of redrock, some of it ice-slicked and steep and nowhere I'd want to be in the dark. And without a headlamp (of course, neither one of us packed one), turning back seemed like an invitation to disaster. Ahead, somewhere, a trail led a few easy miles back to safety. If only we could find it.

The GPS would save us,

right? Wrong. It could tell us where we were, but not how to get to where we wanted to be. We could see the path we sought on the preloaded map, northeast of the little blue dot marking our location. (We'd been using a simple mapping app as a just-in-case backup, not for careful navigation or recording a track—but now it was all too clear that satellites are no substitute for paying attention.) Could we hike to it through the slickrock maze? The tip of my nose had gone numb by the time we decided to stop looking for our missed junction and just hike cross-country in the trail's general direction. "If we go that way, we should intercept it," my boyfriend said, pointing vaguely into the scrub.

Our plan was to hike in a straight line until we found the trail, but that's easier said than done in canyon country. Side canyons small enough to hide between the topo lines kept cropping up and forcing us off track, twisting me further into disorientation. All the snaking washes behind us looked the same in the twilight, and I realized that we'd passed the point of turning back—even if we wanted to. The fear of being truly lost in that sparkingly cold desert made anything but fevered forward motion impossible. I hadn't been so terrified since a lightning bolt struck out of nowhere just as I'd reached 13,000 feet on a New Mexico summit.

Just as the mood went from bad to worse, we scrambled up a rock wall to find a wide, flat bench. A few more hurried minutes brought us straight to the trail, unmistakable and solid. I practically skipped the last couple of miles to the car, where blasting heat coaxed the blood back into my toes. I would not freeze to death in the desert after all.

Of course, it didn't take long to realize we were probably not in mortal danger from the cold. Temps dropped into the low 20s—uncomfortable, for sure, but the weather was dry, so we would have survived. If we'd been stranded overnight where the trail faded out, we had jumping jacks, pacing in circles, body heat. We would've been fine.

Instead, we walked ourselves straight into real danger. Another side canyon or two in the wrong direction on that draining GPS battery, a sprained ankle or a knocked head from slipping on that rock scramble. . . It was easy to see how hikers get into trouble when they lose the trail. I'd never been lost before, and I was unprepared for the gut-punch of panic it can inspire—how losing my place on the map suddenly distorted the friendly wilderness into something menacing. I wanted out of there so urgently that making a decision I knew was reckless still seemed better than lingering another minute in no-man's land. ■

THE VERDICT

PASS

Sort of. Sure, I made it back. But was I just lucky? Hikers have died of injuries trying to extricate themselves from similar situations. The GPS gave us false confidence that we could navigate the tricky terrain. We should have backtracked along the known trail or even waited until morning if darkness made travel sketchy. But that's easier said than done.

FIND YOUR WAY BACK

Use these key skills to avoid making a bad situation worse.

TAKE A BREAK

Off track? Unless your current location poses immediate danger, stop hiking. Rest and have a snack while you decide what to do next.

ASSESS YOUR SITUATION

Try to recall landmarks you can use to pinpoint your location on a map. Consider your supplies and the skills and resources of group members. Are there imminent hazards, like lack of water or changing weather? If you can backtrack safely, do it. If not, await rescue.

PRIORITIZE SAFETY

If you're confident in backtracking, do it in the daylight and allow plenty of time to find shelter and water before dark. Check your direction of travel often, and mark your path with rocks or sticks in case you lose your way again. Don't wander off-trail hoping it'll "just work out."

DON'T "BEND THE MAP"

Disoriented hikers may fall into the trap of telling themselves their surroundings match what's on their map, even when they don't. Look at the terrain first, then try to find what you're seeing in the topo lines, not the other way around. Likewise, trust your GPS and compass—they're usually right.

HELP RESCUERS

Don't make the job harder for searchers. Stay in the area where you got lost. Leave signs if you must move to stay safe, or if you seek higher ground to signal for help.



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DIY Jerky

Go way beyond Slim Jims with these flavorful, make-ahead snacks.

By Pamela Braun, author of *Jerky Everything*

→ “I didn’t grow up with jerky,” says Braun. “But my love for great cuts of meat combined with my near obsession with my dehydrator allowed me to discover that jerky could not only taste delicious, but is ridiculously easy and fairly inexpensive to make.” Each pound of meat makes about four 1-ounce servings.

PREP

For each recipe, mix all ingredients except the jerky base (meat, tofu, etc.) in a 1-gallon, resealable plastic freezer bag. Allow the mixture to rest for 10 minutes, then add the meat, veggie, or tofu strips and mix them around so they get completely coated with the marinade. Remove as much air as possible from the bag, seal, and place it in the refrigerator for 8 to 24 hours. Once or twice during the marinating time, remove the bag from the refrigerator and work the jerky around so the marinade is fully incorporated.

DRY

Remove the strips from the marinade (scrape off excess for faster drying) and arrange in a single layer. A dehydrator works best: Unless otherwise specified, set it to 165°F and begin checking results after four hours. Don’t have a dehydrator? Most gas or electric ovens won’t go below 200°F; to compensate, use a wooden spoon to keep the door ajar, lay strips on a cooling rack set on a baking sheet to improve airflow, and start checking after 2.5 hours. Jerky is ready when it looks dry, but you can bend it without it snapping.

STORE

If you see any oil on the surface, carefully pat it dry with a paper towel. Pack jerky in a resealable plastic bag without excess air, where it will last up to a month at room temperature. For longer storage, vacuum seal or freeze it.

Whiskey Pete Jerky

We took your steakhouse meal with cocktail and made it portable. You’re welcome.

- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup whiskey
- ½ cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup cider vinegar
- 1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 4 drops liquid hickory smoke
- 1 lb. London broil (trimmed of excess fat), cut into ¼- to ½-inch-thick strips

Ginger Miso Eggplant Jerky

Yup, veggies can be jerky, too. This one comes out chewy with a slight crispness and a crowd-pleasing sweet-salty-savory flavor.

- 6 Tbsp white miso
- 3 Tbsp unseasoned rice vinegar
- 1½ Tbsp water
- 1 Tbsp grated fresh ginger
- 2 tsp sesame oil
- 1 tsp soy sauce
- 2 medium-size eggplants (roughly 2 pounds), cut into ¼-inch circles

Dry at 145°F for 4 to 6 hours.

Ginger Chile Salmon Jerky

If you like smoked salmon, you’ll love this citrusy, protein-rich treat.

- 2 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp peeled and grated fresh ginger
- 1 Tbsp chili oil (with seeds)
- 1 Tbsp unseasoned rice vinegar
- 2 tsp kosher salt
- 1 lb. wild salmon (skin removed), cut into ¼-inch-thick strips

Sweet Heat Sriracha Jerky

Those with delicate taste buds, have no fear: The heat from the sriracha fades as this one dries, so you can actually taste the sauce's other flavors.

1/2 cup	unseasoned rice vinegar
1/2 cup	sriracha sauce
1/4 cup	brown sugar
2 tsp	granulated ginger
1 tsp	granulated garlic
1 tsp	salt
1 pound	London broil cut into 1/8- to 1/4-inch-thick strips

Cheddar Jalapeño Turkey Jerky

The tangy cheese and zippy spice of the jalapeños perk up—but don't hide—the flavor of the turkey.

1/2 cup	cider vinegar
1	jalapeño pepper, roughly chopped
3 Tbsp	cheddar cheese powder
1 Tbsp	powdered buttermilk
1 Tbsp	lemon juice
1 tsp	salt
1/2 tsp	onion powder
1 lb.	turkey breast, cut into 1/8- to 1/4-inch-thick slabs



Portobello Bacon Jerky

This vegan option has the same chewy consistency as beef and the smoky flavor of bacon. Even carnivores will like it, we promise.

3 Tbsp	Braggs liquid aminos or soy sauce
2 Tbsp	pure maple syrup (grade B)
2 Tbsp	cider vinegar
1 tsp	paprika
1/2 tsp	smoked paprika
1/4 tsp	smoked salt
A few	grinds of black pepper
8 oz.	portobello mushrooms, sliced 1/4-inch-thick



Tofu Cheddar Crazy Jerky

We've seen meat-eaters inhale this vegan jerky without even asking what it was.

2 Tbsp	lemon juice
2 Tbsp	nutritional yeast
1 tsp	sea salt
Pinch	cayenne pepper (optional)
12 oz.	extra-firm tofu, drained and sliced into 24 strips

In a small bowl, thoroughly mix all the ingredients, except the tofu, and allow the mixture to rest for 10 minutes. Liberally brush the tofu strips, on all sides, with the lemon juice mixture. Dry at 115°F for 4 to 6 hours.

All recipes adapted with permission from *Jerky Everything: Foolproof and Flavorful Recipes for Beef, Pork, Poultry, Game, Fish, Fruit, and Even Vegetables*, by Pamela Braun, The Countryman Press, 2015 (\$20; bit.do/jerky)



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5

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3. Start impromptu
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2. Improvise a bear bag.

1. Plant a summit flag.



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Survival

out alive:
into the ice

I clunked to a stop on a small ledge in the crevasse barely wider than the length of my feet. My back was against a wall and I was standing on a window ledge over the abyss. I had no idea how far in I'd fallen.

A fall into a crevasse on Paradise Glacier separates 50-year-old Richard Hecht (left), and Eugene Allen, 60, during a training climb on Mt. Rainier in March 2001.

By Richard Hecht

▶ GENE AND I WERE BOTH EXPERIENCED OUTDOORSMEN, FULL-TIME DEPUTY SHERIFFS, AND ACTIVE MEMBERS OF OUR DEPARTMENT'S SWAT TEAM. BEFORE ENTERING LAW ENFORCEMENT, GENE HAD SERVED IN THE ARMY WITH SPECIAL FORCES AND AS A HELICOPTER PILOT. I'D COMPETED IN TRIATHLONS AND HAD SERVED AS AN ARMY RANGER. WE HAD CONDUCTED ALL SORTS OF TRAINING IN ALL TYPES OF WEATHER.

So when I joined Gene on a training climb on Mt. Rainier, I had no reason to expect anything but a nice, athletic outing fully within our limits. We started at Paradise, which is at 5,400 feet, with the half-day goal of making it to 8,000 feet. Dressed for an active, winter hike and using snowshoes and hiking poles, up we went.

We reached our target elevation with blue skies ahead. But when we turned around, the once-distant clouds were suddenly right on top of us. Five hundred feet into our descent, we walked right into the storm. Whiteout. I couldn't see where the sky ended and the snow started. We quickly became disoriented. I had a compass, but without visible topography, we lost track of where we were on the mountain and marched on without stopping to take a bearing. We were not roped together (stupidly) and had no idea we were staggering toward one of Paradise Glacier's crevasse fields.

GENE We walked along in our own personal bubbles with me in the lead. There was nothing but flat white to see and nothing but white noise to hear. And then very suddenly, we broke through a snow bridge and were falling.

I was sliding downward on my back, desperately trying to slow myself by digging my heels into the snow. The fall time was like dog years; those three or four seconds seemed like the rest of my life. Then, I clunked to an abrupt stop on a small ledge in the crevasse barely wider than the length of my feet. My back was against a wall and I was standing on a window ledge over the abyss.

I had no idea how far in I'd fallen.

RICHARD I don't know how, but I somehow stopped my slide and was only about 25 feet

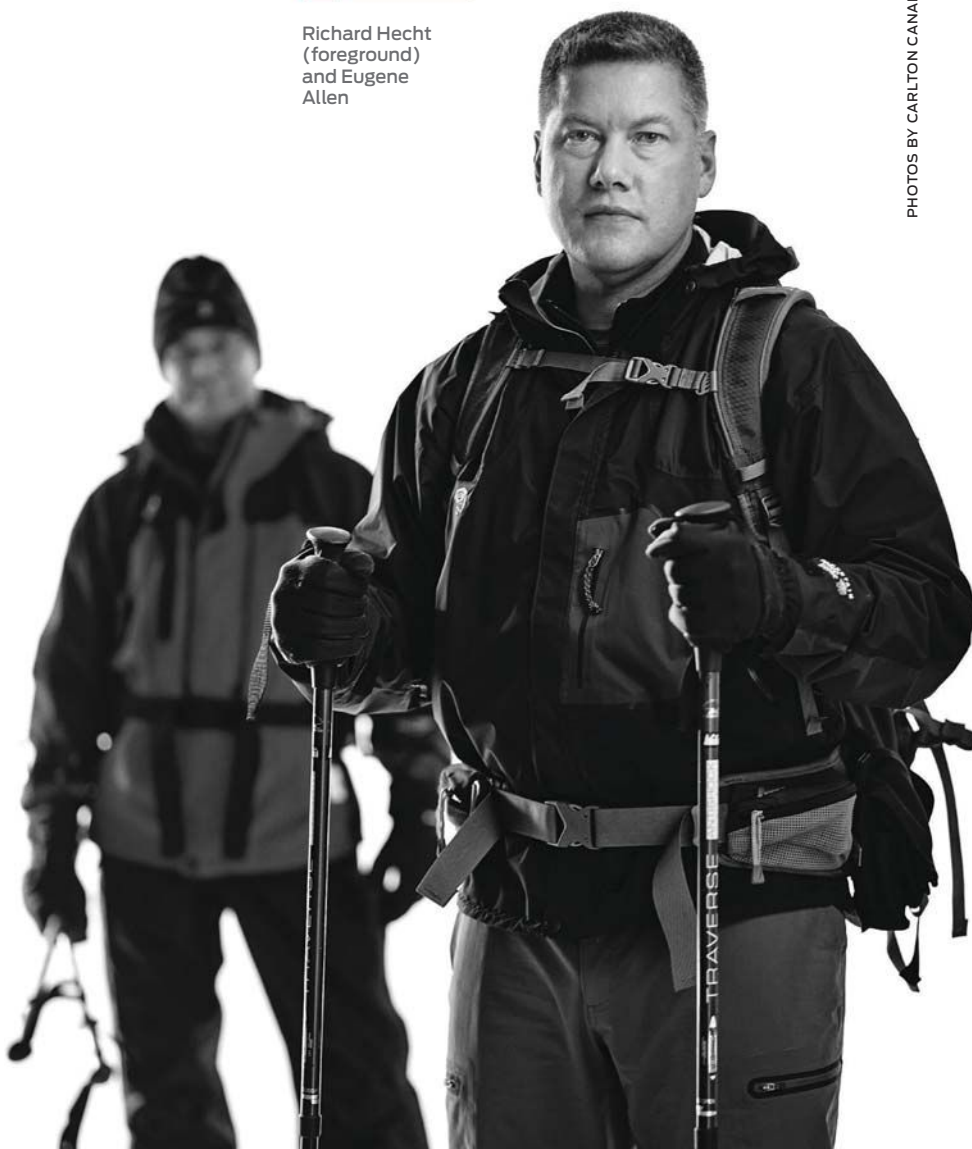
from the lip. I had no idea where Gene was.

I kicked platforms into the snow with my heels, then turned to face the wall and started a long ascent of the 80-degree slope, using my poles for grip. After 45 minutes, I emerged above the surface. The storm was still raging. I only knew which way was down.

I started to scream Gene's name over and over, not knowing where he was, how far down he was, if he could hear me over the storm, or if he was dead. From somewhere below, I heard a faint, "Rich!" Gene was at least alive. We managed to yell a basic rendezvous to each other, "Down and right." Thinking we'd strayed left into the crevasse field, we were going to try to meet up downhill and out of danger.

GENE Rich and I yelled back and forth but the wind ate most of our words. I knew I was on my own to save myself, so I inched to my right and found surer footing—or at least a ledge that seemed slightly larger

Richard Hecht
(foreground)
and Eugene
Allen



PHOTOS BY CARLTON CANARY

than my feet. I turned to face the near-vertical wall and for the next 15 minutes, tried to kick steps and climb out. I could not see in any direction and only knew it was a wall because it was right there touching my nose.

After some hard effort, I bent down to see what was going on with my step-kicking and I saw that rather than making climbing steps, I had knocked the snow off the face and I could see bare rock underneath. I felt a surge of vertigo as it dawned on me that I might have just critically weakened my little platform. I gathered myself and pushed farther along the ledge. After a dozen or so steps, I found myself faced with a new wall of snow, but this wall seemed to tilt away from me just a bit and it was firmer.

For the next hour, I carved hand- and footholds and inched my way up the crevasse. All the while, I couldn't stop thinking about how cold my fingers were and whether they'd become so cold that I'd lose my grip.

The first hint that I was nearing the surface was when the wall turned into a curved face that began to flatten out. After a few more minutes, I saw a rock. The joy came when I was able to stand up and no longer had to cling to the mountain face any more. Even better, I saw a few boot prints. I followed them.

RICHARD About two hours after we'd fallen into the crevasse, I saw a large rock sticking up from the snow. This was the first actual object I'd seen since losing Gene. It was a small mental victory, but one that kept me motivated.

After three more hours of screaming for Gene, I heard a distant but clear, "Rich?" Gene and I had been moving on intersecting courses out of the crevasse field. We linked up 100 yards later and gave each other a strong embrace. I think each of us knew that we had gotten lucky.

A short time later, as we continued to descend, we could hear voices drifting up and we knew we were closing in on Paradise. I'd been hiking on Rainier many times before, but that parking lot full of cars and people never looked so welcoming as it did that day.



SELF-RESCUE FROM A CREVASSE

1. Stay calm. Freaking out won't extract you from your icy predicament any faster—and could end up wedging you deeper inside. Instead, gather your head. "You've got to be able to think clearly because self-rescue will probably take time," says Colorado mountain guide Cindy Gagnon.

2. Get warm. Put on all the layers you have to stay warm, since a long fall could keep you in the crevasse for hours while you or others mount a rescue operation.

3. Assess. If the crevasse is small or slanted, use your hands and feet to pull yourself out. If it's really narrow, try to wriggle back to the surface.

If not, you'll have to get more technical.

4. Make small movements. If you're deeper down, start climbing out—slowly and carefully—by digging your ice axe and crampons into the ice, carving hand- and footholds with your axe as necessary.

5. Improvise. If you can't kick good footholds (or you are without crampons, like Gene and Richard), try planting a knife or collapsed trekking pole into the ice to use as a step.

6. Take your time. Rest often to keep from sweating and to ward off fatigue. Eat and drink to keep energy high. You're gonna need it. —Sarah Lynne Nelson

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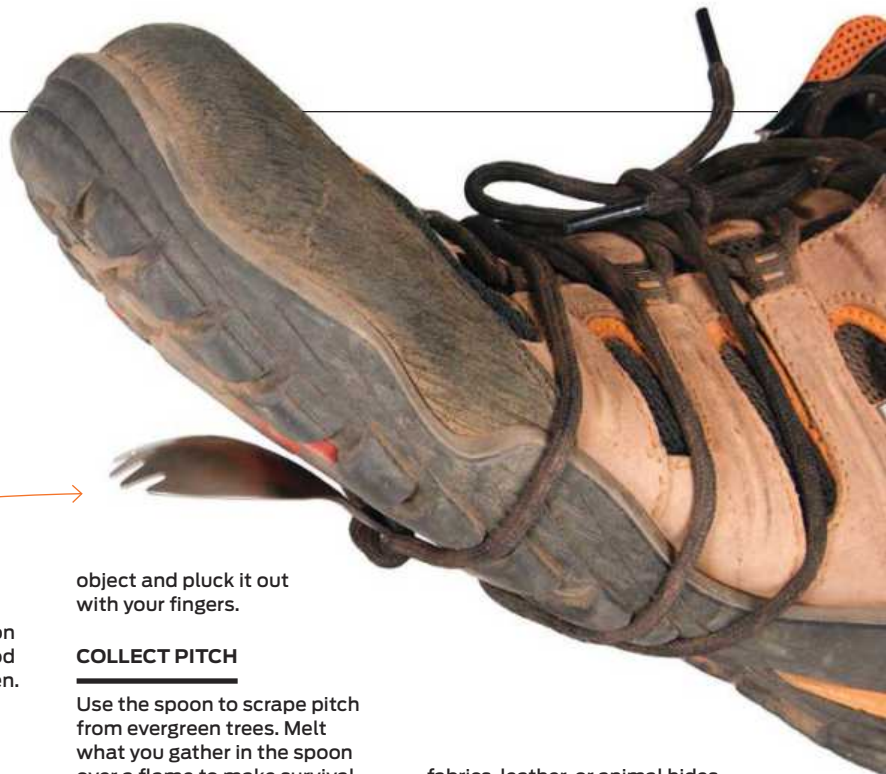
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survival

saved by

Titanium Spork

Put this all-in-one utensil to work in an emergency. By Tom Brown Jr., founder of the Tracker School.



GET A GRIP

Lace the spork to the underside of your boot near the toe (tines out) to create a "crampon" for safer travel over mud, snow, and ice. Slip a sock over your other boot (if traveling over ice), or wrap it with a knotted cord for extra grip.

ARM YOURSELF

Sharpen the spork by using fine-grained stones to file down the edge, then hone it with a river rock. Resharpen frequently.

BURNISH AN EDGE

Press the bottom of the spoon hard against the bone or wood object you're trying to sharpen. This will create a hard, glass-like edge suitable for slicing.

REMOVE TICKS AND SPLINTERS

Position the tines so the space between them is directly over the tick or splinter and press downward on your skin until the offending object rises up. Stretch the skin to isolate the

object and pluck it out with your fingers.

COLLECT PITCH

Use the spoon to scrape pitch from evergreen trees. Melt what you gather in the spoon over a flame to make survival glue. Paste it to bindings and wrappings to improve their holding strength.

PROTECT YOUR DIGITS

Use the spoon like a thimble to press a needle through stiff

fabrics, leather, or animal hides without piercing your thumb.

STRIP BARK

Use the spork to peel strands of fiber from the inside of dead tree bark and use it to improvise cordage.

PHOTO BY
JENNY JAKUBOWSKI

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Snow Support

When snow bridges start to melt in spring, how can I tell if they're still strong enough to hold my body weight?

→ Den Mother usually shies away from advising readers to lose their heads. But in this case, go nuts. Use your trekking poles, branches, or large rocks and channel your inner berserker on those snow bridges. Don't prod like a ninny; stab like a psycho. Try to destroy them. If you can't crash through, step on up; it's safe. (Need something more empirical? Get visual: You're looking for at least 6 inches of ice with 3 to 4 inches of snow on top. If all you can see is snow, it's time for plan B.)

If you're still dubious, scout up and downstream for something better. No dice? Think about sloshing right through the crossing. Better to briefly chill your heels than punch through a bridge and end up in the drink. But if you won't be able to keep

If this is the last crossing on Earth and eyeballing it is making you nervous, wait until the coldest time of night has worked its magic. Retest the bridge around 6 a.m. to see if it refroze.

If time's running out, you can try to cross, but go easy. Think light thoughts. Spread your weight on snowshoes or skis if you have 'em. Otherwise, belly crawl.

What do I do if temperatures drop and my sleeping bag isn't warm enough?

→ The easiest is the tried-and-true: Boil water, dump it in an uninsulated bottle or

If it's not, reduce your bag's empty space—the more volume, the harder to keep it warm—by stuffing the area around your body with dry layers. As a last resort, stuff the spaces with leaves, but only crispers—live leaves are full of moisture, and wet means cold.

The final option? Dig yourself a snow cave. It's hard work, but you'll end up with a shelter right around 32°F. And being tired trumps freezing to death.

Got a question for Den Mother?
Email it to denmother@backpacker.com.

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gear

Cheap Done Right

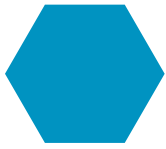
Save big on gear that really works—and learn how to avoid the stuff that doesn't.



Everyone loves a bargain. But the world of low-cost gear can be a minefield of products that don't work, don't last, or both. Our testers took risks so you don't have to: We ordered the cheapest gear we could find online and in

discount stores and put it through real-world testing. From a \$7 stove to a \$30 tent, here's what we found. Plus: Get tips on shopping for used gear, making your own products, and more.

Cheap Done Right



Save at Big Box Stores

Don't dismiss the mass-market chains: Careful shoppers can find great deals on basic items. By Billy Brown

What to look for

Brands Discount stores carry products both from familiar brands and companies you probably haven't heard of. Don't be afraid of unfamiliar brands and remember, unlike third-party deals online (page 50), having a live customer service department is a huge plus.

Design Go with your gut: If you see a stove that looks nothing like, well, a stove, it's either not going to perform well or, at the very least, stump you.

Craftsmanship Time for some hands-on shopping. If the product you want is unpackaged, great. If not, ask a salesperson if there's a sample you can inspect, or if you can open the box. Examine the seams on packs, apparel, and sleeping bags. Small plastic zippers are a bad sign. Feel the material, if it feels thin, if there's pilling, loose threads, or other signs of wear, skip it. If it can't survive sitting on a shelf, it's going to fall apart in the outdoors.

The math

Test gear: Tent + Pack + Bag + Pad + Stove =

\$160

Total savings

\$480*

THE TEST

We headed to Walmart and bought the absolute cheapest gear we could find. Then we took the kit out for a spin in Northern California.



Ozark Trail 2-Person Dome Tent

The good We appreciated the easy setup when it rained on our very first night. The short fly and waterproof walls kept the interior dry. The 49-square-foot floor proved plenty spacious.

The bad Fiberglass poles feel flimsy. Headroom is limited when you're sitting up because of the sloping walls. And no vestibule.

The verdict If you only camp a few times a year in moderate weather, this is a decent tent. But it won't stand up to strong winds and we'd miss a vestibule in extended rain. Materials seem fragile, but at \$30, your biggest risk is guilt if you have to throw it out after one season. **\$30; 5 lbs.**



Ozark Trail 2.0lb/40F Rectangular Sleeping Bag

The good The bag lives up to its warmth rating, which is pretty amazing for the price and weight. Synthetic fill is moisture-resistant.

The bad The rough polyester interior is uncomfortable against bare skin. The small plastic zipper snags when you close it and slips open when you move around. There's no hood and it's bulky (we struggled to fit it into its stuffsack).

The verdict You won't freeze, which makes this \$25 sack a legit bargain. But wear baselayers (or make a liner from a sheet) to mitigate the scratchy interior, or spend a little extra on a more comfortable bag. **\$25; 2 lbs. 3 oz.**



Ozark Trail Self-Inflating Mummy Sleeping Pad

The good The exterior is polyester with a TPU bottom that makes it extremely durable and slip-resistant. And the 2 inches of loft give it a surprising amount of cushioning. It's as comfortable as pads that cost more than twice as much. Bonus: we were able to completely fill it with just eight breaths.

The bad Heavy. And at 8 inches by 7 inches rolled up (like a small sleeping bag), it takes up a lot of pack space if you don't want to lash it outside your pack.

The verdict We're hanging on to it for future trips. **\$40; 2 lbs. 3 oz.**



SOG Barrage Internal Frame Pack

The good The 60-liter packbag easily fits a week's worth of gear. The zippered pockets in the interior keep smaller items from getting lost, and the durable nylon construction inspires confidence in its longevity.

The bad Shoulder straps are thin and lack padding; they dug in uncomfortably when we carried 40-pound loads.

The verdict The volume, organization, and durable material make it a great value for moderate use. But hikers with heavy loads and long distances will want a more comfortable suspension. **\$45; 4 lbs. 8 oz.**

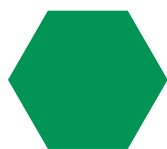


Coleman 10,000 BTU One-Burner Propane Camp Stove

The good Tough, simple, and stable. The large burner accommodates frying pans and spreads out heat. The stove boils a liter of room temperature water in just over three minutes (at an elevation of 1,000 feet).

The bad It weighs more and takes more pack space than standard backpacking stoves. It only works with Coleman's cylindrical propane canisters, which add more weight and bulk.

The verdict For mostly car-camping and paddling use, with occasional short-mileage backpacking, it's a solid bargain. **\$20; 1 lb. 5 oz.**



Do It Yourself

Save a few bucks but, more importantly, earn bragging rights by making your own gear.

Start small Basic products, like a stuffsack or hammock, let you get a feel for the work (and your aptitude).

What you'll need Scott Littlefield, founder of DIYGearSupply.com (a source for patterns and material), recommends the following kit for making gear at home.

Sewing machine "Basic home machines will get the job done, but if you can search out one with metal gears at a thrift shop, all the better," Littlefield says.

Seam ripper "You're going to make mistakes," he says. "A \$3 seam ripper will let you undo those mistakes and try again."

Fabric scissors Littlefield uses Fiskars 8 Inch Softtouch Spring Action (\$15; amazon.com).

Fabric tape measure The standard 60 inches is fine for most projects, but a longer one will be useful for some gear, like a tarp.

Plus: Pins/cushion and a Sharpie

Premade patterns If you have sewing experience and want to save more money, use a pattern and buy your own materials.

Premade kits If you're a beginner or looking to make something more complicated, consider a complete kit, which comes with step-by-step instructions and premeasured materials. Ultralight hiking evangelist Ray Jardine offers complete kits for packs (starting at \$83), tarp shelters (starting at \$80), sleeping quilts (starting at \$110), and pads (\$14, foam not included) at rayjardine.com. We had Sterling Dintersmith, a Massachusetts hiker who has been sewing her own gear for about five years, make some Jardine gear. She pronounced the bag "comfy and fun to make," but said the pack was a bit complex.

Custom designs "Be creative," says Dintersmith. "I like making things as crazy and exciting as I want. I made a poncho out of see-through waterproof fabric and I made a see-through hood that goes down over your face—so even in the worst blowing rain you can see while you hike. I haven't solved the fogging issue yet."

The math

Quilt + Pack + Tarp =
\$190

Total savings
\$210*

BEGINNER TIPS

Material "Start with some extra fabric from the project you have in mind [after you cut out your pattern] and build a couple of stuffsacks with the scrap," Littlefield says. "You'll learn how the materials handle with your machine." Tip: It's better to cut big and trim down than to cut too small and waste material.

Time The savings are real with DIY gear, but you need to be realistic about the amount of time you'll spend sewing. According to Littlefield, here's roughly how many dollars and hours you can expect to invest in common DIY products.

Hammock

\$25

1.5 to 2 hours (add a bug net for \$20 and 2.5 to 3 hours)

Quilt

Synthetic: \$60 and up (depends on temperature rating; \$60 is for 40°F)
3 to 5 hours.

Down: \$100 and up
5 to 8 hours

Stuffsack

\$6

30 minutes (but you'll get a few sacks)

Silnylon tarp

\$40 to \$80 (depending on size)
5 to 8 hours

Pack

\$40 to \$50

10 to 15 hours (more if it's your first try)

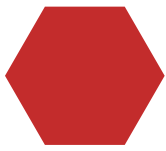
PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / FRANCISBLACK; JENNY JAKUBOWSKI



Shop smart, and you could save enough for a national park vacation.



Cheap Done Right



Work the Web

From used gear to factory-direct products, the Internet is full of hidden treasure. But beware of pirates. By Kelly Bastone

Factory Direct

Amazon surfers may be tempted by a growing market of outdoor gear at prices that seem too good to be true: \$7 backpacking stoves, \$25 tents, and \$45 sleeping bags to name a just a few. Typically, the cut-rate equipment comes from unfamiliar names, and some display no brand affiliation at all.

These copycat products are sometimes sold directly by an overseas manufacturer (usually in China), cutting out everything from sales reps to customer service in order to keep prices low. How can you tell the difference between a great value and a big mistake? We ordered a full kit from Amazon to find out. Spoiler: For the most part, the prices are too good to be true, but we did find one bargain that lived up to its promise. Here's what we learned on a three-day backpacking trip in northern Colorado.

The math

Test gear: Tent +
Boots + Pack + Bag
+ Stove =
\$154

Total savings
\$446*

SHOP SAVVY

Read product reviews carefully to gauge in-the-field performance.

Are happy customers using the equipment as you intend to? (Upon closer inspection, we saw that the positive feedback for the NTK tent came from people who'd bought it as an indoor playhouse for kids).

Consider your size.











If you're an average American, you're a giant by Chinese standards. You may not fit comfortably into super-cheap tents, sleeping bags, and packs that are produced in Asia without attention to U.S. norms.

Search hiker forums to see how cheap models perform over time.

Some research revealed that many hikers have reported good long-term use out of the \$7 stove, even if its self-ignitor tends to fail early on.

Check the fine print:

Most third-party sellers on Amazon set their own return policies—and customer service isn't always their priority. Read the Returns and Refunds Policy section of the seller's profile page. Alternative: Amazon's A to Z Guarantee allows you to file a claim for a return, but you'll likely have to show the product is defective.

				
NTK Panda 2 Tent	Nevados Boomerang II Low Hiking Shoe	Kenox Outdoor Internal Frame Backpack 60L	Naturehike Ultralight Sleeping Bag	Ultralight Backpacking Stove**
				
<p>The good The thick blue tarpaulin floor is durable.</p> <p>The bad All over, craftsmanship is terrible: Huge, sloppy seam allowances create bunched fabric in the tent corners, and visible stitch holes in the canopy leak (as does the tiny vent in windblown rain). The fiberglass pole segments frequently pop apart.</p> <p>The verdict It's for indoor camping. \$25; 3 lbs. 2 oz.</p>	<p>The good The sticky lugged sole delivers adequate traction on dry rocks and trail.</p> <p>The bad They're not waterproof or very breathable. And some seams separated after just one weekend of wear.</p> <p>The verdict Lack of durability doesn't justify even this low price. \$36; 1 lb. 14 oz. (w's 6.5)</p>	<p>The good The suspension (using two vertical metal stays) ably carried a 30-pound load.</p> <p>The bad Overstuffing causes the backpanel to barrel outward, the non-adjustable torso only fits 5-footers, and the lid-pocket zipper and mesh bottle pocket seam failed.</p> <p>The verdict While it's surprisingly light for the capacity, durability is a deal killer. \$41; 2 lbs. 6 oz.</p>	<p>The good Compressed, it's soccer-ball size.</p> <p>The bad It's barely long enough for a 5-foot tester (who found the cut too narrow). The insulation is wafer-thin, drafts entered along the zipper, and the seams created cold spots—our tester shivered through a 37°F night despite the 32°F comfort rating.</p> <p>The verdict A good night's sleep is worth the extra dough. \$45; 2 lbs. 6 oz.</p>	<p>The good This no-brand mini cooker looks a lot like pricier stoves on the market, and it worked about the same: firing up reliably and boiling water like champ.</p> <p>The bad The pot supports are small, making it essential to choose a stable surface and to balance pots carefully. The Piezo ignitor likely won't last.</p> <p>The verdict So far, this stove has delivered solid performance for a lot less. \$7; 3 oz.</p>

*Based on average retail price for similar products approved by BACKPACKER testers

**Full name: Ultralight Backpacking Canister Camp Stove with Piezo Ignition

Second Chance

One hiker's house cleaning is another hiker's shopping spree. By Billy Brown

Conquer Craigslist

Every bargain hunter in the country knows this site can yield dividends, but finding the best deals requires an investment in time. Use these tips to get the goods.

Shop smart Hardgoods like tents, backpacks, stoves, and water filters are the best bet. Skip next-to-skin layers.

Examine photos Pictures can give clues about how well a seller has treated and maintained his or her gear. Look for clear photos of the gear as a whole and close-ups of high-wear areas (zippers, seams, joints, tread, etc.). If good photos aren't provided, ask for them.

Ask questions Avoid wasted trips to a stranger's house by asking for key information ahead of time. "Do you hike/backpack much?" "How often did you use XXX?" "Have you used many of XXX before?" "Why are you selling XXX?"

Learn to negotiate If you see something you like, research what a comparable item costs new and use that as a bargaining tool. Offer around 20 percent less than the asking price, but avoid too-round numbers like multiples of \$50. Aggressive low-ball offers rarely get responses. Never expect the seller to have change.

Shop safe Take a friend to see the gear in person, at a neutral location, if possible.

Try before you buy Shopping for a stove? Bring a fuel canister with you so you can fire it up. Set up tents and load up packs. Try on shoes and apparel, and open and close all zippers. Operate clips, buckles, and every other closure on packs. Ask the seller if you can test the waterproofing with a faucet or hose.

Wash before using Duh. We like Nikwax Tech Wash (\$10; nikwax-usa.com) for cleaning softgoods.

The math

At press time, we found the following deals:

Boston, MA:
REI Half Dome tent for **\$100**, 55% off retail

San Francisco, CA:
MSR Miniworks EX water filter for **\$35**, 62% off retail

Boulder, CO:
Marmot Zeus down jacket for **\$85**, 58% off retail

Total savings

\$284

Digital Clearance Racks

Last year's models go cheap at online retailers. By Billy Brown

You'll find some of the best deals—quality new gear at low prices—at discount sites that specialize in outdoor products. The catch? They usually offer overstock from the previous season, or discontinued models or colors, so you can't be after the latest technology or a specific product. Think of it like buying from your local gear shop's clearance rack, but with a much, much better selection.

The math

At press time, we found these deals:

Marmot Backroad Fleece Jacket for **\$65** (60% off retail) on REI.com/outlet

Big Agnes Seedhouse 3p Tent for **\$180** (60% off retail) at Backcountry.com

LOWA Albul GTX boots for **\$135** (53% off retail) at Sierratradingpost.com

Total savings

\$409

Save a thru-hike's worth of laundry money by shopping online discounters.

Where to Shop

The best sites have a wide range of inventory, and offer a return policy that gives you peace of mind.

ALTREC.COM

Keep an eye out for bonus gifts: At press time, shoppers got a free watch with most purchases.

BACKCOUNTRY.COM

Hit their outlet for deals up to 80% off (free two-day shipping on orders over \$50).

GEARTRADE.COM

It's eBay for gear—especially useful if you live far from a Craigslist-friendly metro area.

REI.COM/OUTLET

Check for the Deal of the Day/Deal of the Week, which offer huge (upwards of 50%) discounts.

SIERRATRADINGPOST.COM

A 365-day return policy makes this site easy to love. Watch the clearance section, where it's not uncommon to find gear marked down up to 88%.

STEEPANDCHEAP.COM

The limited-time offers tempt gearheads to buy stuff they don't even need.





EVENT DETAILS

REI		
3/22/16	BOISE, ID	7:00 PM
AL'S SPORTING GOODS		
3/23/16	LOGAN, UT	6:30 PM
REI		
3/31/16	HENDERSON, NV	6:30 PM
ADVENTURE 16		
4/6/16	LOS ANGELES, CA	7:00 PM
ADVENTURE 16		
4/9/16	SAN DIEGO, CA	10:30 AM
ARIZONA HIKING SHACK		
4/11/16	PHOENIX, AZ	6:30 PM

COMING TO A TOWN NEAR YOU

MARCH – OCTOBER 2016

SUMMIT HUT		
4/14/16	ORO VALLEY, AZ	7:00 PM
BACKWOODS		
4/25/16	FT. WORTH, TX	6:30 PM
LEWIS AND CLARK		
5/2/16	SPRINGDALE, AZ	7:00 PM
BACKWOODS		
5/3/16	OK CITY, OK	6:30 PM
ALPINE SHOP		
5/6/16	KIRKWOOD, MO	6:30 PM
TRAIL DAYS		
5/13 – 5/15	DAMASCUS, VA	
MAST GENERAL STORE		
5/17/16	W-SALEM, NC	6:30 PM
THE LOCAL HIKER		
5/18/16	SPARTANBURG, SC	6:00 PM
REI		
5/23/16	ATLANTA, GA	6:30 PM
MAST GENERAL STORE		
5/24/16	ASHEVILLE, NC	6:30 PM
ASHEVILLE MOUNTAIN SPORTS FEST		
5/27 – 5/29	ASHEVILLE, NC	

For more details please visit
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100 YEARS,
100 THINGS WE LOVE

HIDDEN WONDERS

**If you want to find the best-kept secrets
of the national parks system, you need to
look beyond the national parks.**

BY PAUL CHISHOLM

A photograph of a massive, layered sandstone cliff face. The rock shows distinct horizontal sedimentary bands and vertical erosion patterns. At the base of the cliff, there are several small, rectangular stone structures, which are the remains of ancient ruins. The foreground consists of a rocky, sloping terrain with some sparse green vegetation.

See 12th-century First Ruin—
the oldest Puebloan ruin in
Canyon de Chelly—wedged
between the cliffs from
Junction Overlook. Flip the
page for more beta.



MAYBE THEY'RE HIDING SOMETHING. Of the 409 different properties maintained by the NPS, 350 of them are not actually national parks. But that doesn't mean they aren't worthy. From miniscule Devils Tower National Monument in Wyoming (1,300 acres) to enormous Noatak National Preserve in Alaska (6.5 million acres), we scoured the lot to bring you the 10 best non-national parks for hikers. Together, these national monuments, seashores, and historic parks have all the scenery and wildlife as their better-known brethren, but none of the crowds. Now who's hiding something?



Spot Puebloan cave dwellings on the 2.5-mile White House Ruin Trail, the only trail you can hike without a guide.

46 OF #NPS100

Explore a living museum of Navajo culture.

CANYON DEL MUERTO ROUTE, CANYON DE CHELLY NATIONAL MONUMENT, ARIZONA

While most national park units seem frozen in time, Canyon de Chelly (pronounced de-SHAY) continues to evolve. Navajo still live and work on the canyon floor amongst the ruins of Ancestral Puebloan predecessors (Canyon de Chelly is the only NPS unit that's fully tribe-owned and cooperatively managed). Their

ancestors faced removal at the hands of Kit Carson during the winter of 1863 to '64, but many Navajo resisted capture, sending Carson and his men on a years-long chase (read about it at backpacker.com/catch-me-if-you-can). Tour the maze of serpentine canyons, and you'll see how Canyon de Chelly could make for a challenging game of hide-and-seek.

Only a small portion of the canyon floor is accessible without a permit, so visitors must hire a Navajo guide to explore the rest of the canyon's interior. Propose a 7- to 10-mile route through the lower end of Canyon del Muerto to see petroglyphs, Puebloan ruins, and a piece of Navajo history. Descend into the canyon on the Bare Trail and head upstream;

scan for Ledge Ruin 100 feet above the canyon floor at mile 1.6. Pass petroglyphs depicting hunters and pronghorn on the north side of the canyon at miles 1.8 and 2.7 before arriving at Antelope House Ruins (the most intact Puebloan sites on the route, as well as the best place to camp) at mile 3.4. Pass 700-foot-tall Fortress Rock, where oral tradition holds that a handful of Navajo held out for weeks against American cavalymen, then climb out of the canyon on the Crack in Rock Trail. **Distance** 7-10 miles, 1-2 days **Trailhead** 36.160328, -109.476963 **Season** September through June **Guide** About \$250/day; bit.do/canyon-de-chelly-guides **Permit** Included in guide packages **Contact** nps.gov/cach

THE FIRST 100 YEARS

Want to peer back in time? Look up. General Grant, a 267-foot-tall sequoia in Kings Canyon National Park, was once the crown jewel of a namesake national park. Established in 1890 alongside Sequoia and Yosemite, General Grant National Park struggled mightily to attract visitors until Captain Charles Young, the Park Service's first African-American superintendent, built a wagon road into the Giant Forest in 1903. Backcountry campsites and the High Sierra Trail followed. In 1940, however, the park fell victim to post-Depression budget consolidation, eventually getting subsumed by Kings Canyon. Although its park status didn't last, General Grant's signature tree remains, attracting more than a million visitors annually.

—Trent Knoss

Hike atop 2,000-foot sea cliffs on the 3.5-mile Kalaupapa Trail.



45 OF #NPS100

Descend seaside cliffs to discover a piece of Hawaiian history.

KALAUPAPA TRAIL, KALAUPAPA NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK, HAWAII

When leprosy hit Hawaii in the mid-19th century, King Kamehameha V tried to isolate the disease by banishing lepers to the most rugged corner of the kingdom. The extreme geography of the peninsula on

Molokai provided a perfect setting for what was essentially a prison: 2,000-foot *na pali*, or sea cliffs, kept lepers quarantined, while the jagged reefs and seastacks lined the coastline like barbed-wire.

The era of forced isolation ended in 1969, and now the only land-based access to the historical park is via a 3.5-mile footpath (make arrangements beforehand with the official park concessionaire) that traces some of Hawaii's tallest seaside cliffs. Get going by 8 a.m. to reach the settlement for the 10 a.m. tour. Keep an eye out for endemic plant species, like the stocky

pua'ala shrub, the purple-flowered *awikiwiki* vine, or the pungent *makou* forb, and emerge onto the broad Kalaupapa Peninsula near mile 2.7. Continue to the buildings of the former settlement to meet your guide for a four-hour bus tour through the colony. Camping is prohibited in the park, so spend the night at Pala'au State Park (\$12/night) near the trailhead. **Distance** 7 miles, 1 day **Trailhead** 21.171526, -156.998781 **Guide** \$54; fatherdamientours.com **Shuttle** \$28; molokaitaxi.com **Season** Year-round **Permit** Included with tour **Contact** nps.gov/kala

44 OF #NPS100

FREE DAYS

Most views are worth the entry fee—but they sure do look a little sweeter when they're free of charge. Mark your calendar for the rest of 2016's freebies.

April 16 to 24 National Park Week

August 25 to 28 National Park Service's birthday

September 24 National Public Lands Day

November 11 Veterans Day

43 OF #NPS100

*See the view
that greeted
Lewis and Clark.*

**PRAIRIE FIRE-
PALMER CREEK LOOP,
TALLGRASS PRAIRIE
NATIONAL PRESERVE,
KANSAS**

It's easy to forget what century you're in as you stroll through a wide-open prairie, the emerald tips of the plants shimmering in the afternoon breeze like ripples on a lake. Patches of blackened earth mark the places where recent prescribed burns performed their rejuvenating duty, destroying perennial vegetation to allow the regeneration of native prairie grasses and forbs. In the 16th century, when European explorers first ventured into the North American interior, a vast sea of prairie grass stretched from the Mississippi to the Rockies.

The 11,000-acre Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, created in 1996, protects one of the last intact examples of this endangered plains ecosystem. "The hard, rocky soil preserved this area of upland tallgrass prairie," explains Heather Brown, chief of interpretation. "It just couldn't be tilled."

See it all on a 10-mile dayhike. From the visitor center, head 3.2 miles north on the graveled Scenic Overlook Trail to a bluff for the best view of the preserve's herd of resident bison (there are 75). The meadow to the west explodes with prairie coneflower and wild indigo wildflowers in spring. Continue north on the Prairie Fire Loop, passing a shaded stream near mile 7 before linking up with the Davis Trail for the journey back. (Camping isn't allowed at the preserve—drive 8 miles south to Chase State Fishing Lake for free first-come, first-serve campsites).

Distance 10 miles, 1 day

Trailhead 38.433421, -96.558151

Season Year-round **Permit** None

Contact nps.gov/tapr



PHOTO BY SEAN FITZGERALD

The prairie is lushest (and dotted with blooming ground plum) in April and May.





Walk beneath 50-foot organ pipe cacti en route to the Bates Mountains.

42 OF #NPS100

THE SHUTTLES

How significant are the NPS's shuttle systems to the park experience? Look at it this way: Think of all the cars those riders and miles represent. Picture endless rush hour traffic—and the impacts on noise and air quality. And that's without considering the point-to-point backpacking trips that the shuttles enable. In short, the shuttles keep the parks from becoming parking lots.

7,300,000
riders

3,400,000
miles (2014)

41 OF #NPS100

READER'S CHOICE

**THEY PROVIDE
THE BEST SCENERY
FOR APRÈS-HIKE
HAPPY HOUR**

"Dayhike 13 miles from Siyeh Bend on the west side of the Continental Divide in Glacier National Park, over Piegan Pass, past Grinnell Lake, and into the Interlaken Lounge at Many Glacier Hotel for a cold one." —*Justin Grigg*



PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) ED CALLAERT; ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / ANSONSAW; AIDAN LYNN-KLIMENKO AND MADISON PERRINS (5)

40 OF #NPS100

Camp in an otherworldly desert.

BATES MOUNTAINS ROUTE, ORGAN PIPE CACTUS NATIONAL MONUMENT, ARIZONA

When 70 percent of Organ Pipe's backcountry was closed in 2003 due to security concerns (the park has been a thoroughfare for illegal immigration since the 1990s), backpackers lost out on the "lushest, greenest" desert in southern Arizona, says Sue Walter, chief of interpretation. A UNESCO International Biosphere Reserve, the monument is the only spot where visitors can see the park's namesake cactus in significant numbers and camp in the most biologically diverse region in the Sonoran Desert. Fortunately, security has improved. "We just opened up the backcountry last year and haven't had any conflicts," assures Walter.

Take advantage of Organ Pipe's grand reopening by traversing the 3,000-foot Bates Mountains (check to make sure it's still open beforehand). Pack enough water for the whole trip, and head north from the turnout on Puerto Blanco Drive through stands of 50-foot saguaro and organ pipe cacti. Camp below 3,197-foot Kino Peak near mile 7; listen for howling coyotes and chirping bats at twilight. Next day, summit Kino via a class-3 scramble up the east buttress (keep your eyes peeled for desert bighorn sheep) for a 360-degree view of the Sonoran Desert. Retrace your steps to your car. **Distance** 16 miles, 2 days **Trailhead** 32.031661, -112.951522 **Season** November through April **Permit** \$5/group **Contact** nps.gov/orpi

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Peer into the azure depths of a 300-foot-deep spring.

OZARK TRAIL, OZARK NATIONAL SCENIC RIVERWAYS, MISSOURI

A salamander peeking from a rotten log; beads of dew dripping down a cliff wallpapered with moss; morning mist floating over a silent forest. While many national park units evoke images of sweeping vistas and soaring heights, a visit to this quiet corner of the Midwest turns your appreciation to the small things. Ozark National Scenic Riverways, encompassing the Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, preserve 134 miles of the most pristine riparian corridor in the central United States—a land of rocky glades, pine-covered plateaus, and limestone bluffs. "Caves, springs, sinkholes—the whole thing is just a big honeycomb beneath the surface," says Dave Tobey, a former interpretive park ranger at ONSR.

Sample it on a 14-mile point-to-point from the Peck Ranch trailhead. Pick up the Ozark Trail near mile .6 and head to Rocky Falls, a 40-foot cascade that's worth the .5-mile detour. Continue through dense oak-hickory forest and camp near Indian Creek at mile 8. Next day, follow the Current River upstream to 300-foot-deep Blue Spring before hitting the Powder Mill trailhead and shuttling back to your car. **Distance** 14 miles, 2 days **Trailhead** 37.053180, -91.184300 **Shuttle car** 37.184954, -91.175161 (commercial option: Akers Ferry Canoe Rental; \$50/two people) **Season** Year-round **Permit** None **Contact** nps.gov/ozar



THE NEXT GENERATION

Our National Parks Centennial team, Madison Perrins and Aidan Lynn-Klimenko, have spent the past few months and 26,000 miles exploring our country's wilds. They've discovered plenty of beauty, and also learned a lot about our trash habits (national park visitors produce 100 million pounds of garbage each year). But they remain hopeful for the future: "Kids recognize this very easily," Perrins says. "When we asked them why minimizing waste is important, they pointed out that it preserves the environment and protects the parks' animals." To hear kids' takes on waste in the parks, visit backpacker.com/NPS100. For more on Subaru's initiative to bring its zero-landfill expertise to the national parks, see subaru.com/environment.

“WE WANT TO
GIVE BACK
TO
NATURE
BECAUSE NATURE DOES
EVERYTHING
FOR US,
BASICALLY.”



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*Follow the footsteps
of gold-crazed
prospectors.*

**CHILKOOT TRAIL,
KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH
NATIONAL HISTORICAL
PARK, ALASKA**

Picture this: A hoard of anxious trekkers assembles in the shadow of a snow-capped mountain range. Glaciers adorn the peaks, their icy tendrils melting into a lush alpine valley. The hikers await permission from local rangers to proceed. The criterion for a permit? One ton of gear—enough to survive a full year prospecting for gold in the Yukon. *Sorry, ultralighters!*

More than a hundred years later, visitors can relive the Klondike Gold Rush on the 33-mile Chilkoot Trail, which cuts through a rainforest to a glacier-framed pass. Start at Dyea, a 19th-century oceanside boomtown, and spend night one at Finnegan's Point (mile 4.8) on the banks of the Taiya River. Old hand tools and rusty appliances litter the way en route to Sheep Camp (mile 13), which hides in the spruces near the river. Next day, climb 3,501-foot Chilkoot Pass (killer view of ice-capped, 5,876-foot Mt. Hoffmann here) and descend to Happy Camp (mile 20.5), which overlooks the glacier-hewn shores of Long Lake. From here, it's an easy 12.5 miles to Bennett Lake. **Distance** 33 miles; 4-5 days **Trailhead** 59.511691, -135.346530; call (907) 617-7551 for a shuttle from Skagway. **Season** Late May through early September **Permit** Required June-September (\$64/person); obtain at the Chilkoot Trail Center in Skagway or call (867) 667-3910 **Contact** nps.gov/klgo

Lindeman Creek's rapids splash trailside on the back-end of the Chilkoot route.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN WALKER (LEFT); ISTOCKPHOTO.COM / KENOWOLFPAK



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THE PARK NATIVES

Here are 5 living, breathing reasons to plan your next trip.
By Sarah Lynne Nelson

Panamint Alligator Lizards **Death Valley, California**

The name says it all—these 6-inch lizards, which only live in and around Death Valley, look like miniature versions of their 15-foot namesakes. Spot the striped (black, brown, and tan) reptiles near streams in canyon-bottoms. **Contact** nps.gov/deva

West Indian Manatees **Everglades, Florida**

It's easy to see why lonely sailors once mistook these mammals for mermaids—the thousand-pound sea cows glide effortlessly through shallow-water tidal creeks, estuaries, and salt-water bays. Look for their gray, wrinkled heads bobbing near the surface (they come up for air every five minutes). **Contact** nps.gov/ever

Pygmy Rabbits **Great Basin, Nevada**

They may be the cutest creatures on this list, but these guys are the toughest to spot: They're the smallest rabbits in the world (adults weigh less than a pound) and they're endangered. Only found in Great Basin, these fist-size, gray bunnies emerge from their burrows to munch on sagebrush (most active at twilight). **Contact** nps.gov/grba

Hellbender Salamanders **Great Smoky Mountains, North Carolina/Tennessee**

This park is known as the "Salamander Capital of the World" for a reason. More of these colorful amphibians roam the area than humans. The king of them all: 30-inch-long hellbenders, which prefer damp areas near streams (they're nocturnal). **Contact** nps.gov/grsm

California Condors **Grand Canyon, Arizona**

The largest land birds in North America, these raptors can weigh up to 30 pounds—and soar 50 mph thanks to 9-foot wingspans. Scan for them **coasting on thermals overhead, or look for them roosting on cliffs and in conifers (they're black with red heads).** **Contact** nps.gov/grca



Discover Native American ruins on a lonely desert mesa.

YAPASHI PUEBLO LOOP, BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT, NEW MEXICO

For more than 10,000 years, Bandelier was the home of an Ancestral Puebloan civilization. Nearly 700 years later, it's a national monument filled with ancient artifacts—from potsherds to multi-storied buildings—and more than 70 miles of trail. Ladders allow access to frontcountry ruins in Frijoles Canyon, but backcountry archaeological sites remain comparatively untouched.

For the best tour, take this 16-mile loop, which hits Yapashi Pueblo, the largest unrestored pueblo in Bandelier. Take the Frijoles Canyon and Rim Trail (expect tricky terrain in spots, due to a 2014 flood), which looks down on the ancient Frijoles Canyon structures. Then, pick up the Stone Lions Trail to reach Alamo Creek, one of the route's few seasonal water sources (call ahead to check). Fill up and find a campsite atop the mesa, a mile or so from the creek. (Dispersed camping is permitted on the mesas and ridgetops in Bandelier; camping in the canyon bottoms is sometimes allowed but subject to unpredictable closures.) Next day, stop by the Yapashi Pueblo; surveys indicate it was four stories tall and contained 350 rooms on the ground floor. Take the Mid Alamo Trail back to your car. Note: Treat archaeological sites with respect. "These are still sacred sites," says chief of resource management Jeremy Sweat. **Distance** 16 miles, 2 days **Trailhead** 35.778263, -106.270950 **Season** March through December **Permit** Free; obtain at the visitor center **Contact** nps.gov/band

Explore 11,000-year-old ruins and petroglyphs carved into the volcanic tuff in Bandelier.



Journey through Jurassic Park.

FLORIDA TRAIL LOOP, BIG CYPRESS NATIONAL PRESERVE, FLORIDA

Hikers are often disappointed when they look at a map of the Everglades: not many trails in the paddler's paradise. But dozens of miles of footpaths meander through Big Cypress National Preserve, the Everglades' freshwater cousin to the north. Sure, the trails are often submerged in 1 to 2 feet of water (bring trekking poles to test footing), but campsites are always dry and the trail corridor is easily distinguishable through the dense foliage. Nowhere else can you explore the Lower 48's only subtropical forest on foot. Several species found here—such as the Florida sandhill crane, Big Cypress fox squirrel, and alligator lily—exist nowhere else on the planet, while other residents, like the elusive Florida panther, are protected as endangered species.

Explore this biodiversity hot spot on a 13-mile loop through the heart of the preserve's backcountry. Strike out north on the Florida Trail from the Oasis Visitor Center (pools to the east of the center are home to dozens of alligators) to 7-Mile Camp, where you'll pitch a tent on a dry pine island among a garden of saw palmettos (blooming March to May). In the morning, head west on the blue-blazed path and loop 6.2 miles back to the Florida Trail. From here, retrace your steps 2.9 miles to the parking area. January and February tend to be the driest months, but be prepared for wet sections of trail any time of year. **Distance** 13 miles, 2 days **Trailhead** 25.857177, -81.033225 **Season** October-April **Permit** Free; obtain online or at Oasis **Contact** nps.gov/bicy

Best of the Rest

Still looking for the perfect trip? You can't go wrong at any of these hiker heavens.

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE, CALIFORNIA

Try this: Coast Trail (16 miles, 2 days)

PICTURED ROCKS NATIONAL LAKESHORE, MICHIGAN

Try this: North Country Trail (42 miles, 4-5 days)

CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT, IDAHO

Try this: Wilderness Trail (8 miles, 1-2 days)

BUFFALO NATIONAL RIVER, ARKANSAS

Try this: Buffalo River Trail (36 miles, 4 days)

DINOSAUR NATIONAL MONUMENT, COLORADO

Try this: Jones Hole Trail (9 miles, 1 day)

THE NEXT 100 YEARS

Drones and national parks rarely mix, and after several forehead-slapping incidents involving amateur pilots (read: crashes), the NPS banned the flying nuisances system-wide in 2014. But the unmanned aircraft have been making legal forays in park skies—in service of the parks. In August 2015, officials used a drone to steer water-dropping helicopters to suppress a wildfire in Olympic National Park. “By next year, we’ll see increased usage,” Brad Koeckeritz, the Department of the Interior’s national unmanned-aircraft specialist, told *The Seattle Times*. “It’ll be consistent growth of these aircraft as time goes on.” Drones could eventually aid search-and-rescue operations in rugged, remote terrain and quieter, higher-flying models may help park biologists evaluate animal populations. The NPS has taken it slow when it comes to approving drone flights in an official capacity, and some hikers remain wary of motorized intrusions on protected lands. Still, it’s possible to imagine a future when a once-banned technology actually improves the quality of our parks rather than detracts from it.

—Trent Knoss



Stare down the barrel of Ute Canyon from Liberty Cap.

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Snake through a canyon maze.

LIBERTY CAP-UTE CANYON LOOP, COLORADO
NATIONAL MONUMENT, COLORADO

In 2014, 1.3 million people flocked to the iconic sandstone formations at Arches National Park. In the same year, less than a third that many visited Colorado National Monument. Take away: Hikers who want to explore a sandstone wonderland without the crowds are in luck. But it won’t remain anonymous for long—efforts to upgrade the monument to full national park status have gained traction. The time to visit is now.

Get a sampler platter of Southwest geology on this 11-mile overnight from the Liberty Cap trailhead. Follow good trail across a thinly forested ridgetop that affords views into the 500-foot-deep canyons that drop off on either side of the trail. Scramble up 5,880-foot Liberty Cap for a view of the surrounding valley and canyonlands before heading into seldom-visited Ute Canyon. Look for the 200-foot expanse of Finger Arch, extending like a teacup handle from the eastern canyon wall, near mile 7.6, and pitch a tent in the canyon bottom. Reach Rim Rock Drive at the end of the trail and shuttle, walk, or hitch the 2.9 miles back to your car. Water is scarce year-round; pack enough to last the trip. **Distance** 11 miles, 1-2 days **Trailhead** 39.055555, -108.737006 **Shuttle car** 39.036883, 108.708983 (Commercial option: Sunshine Taxi; \$14/two people) **Season** March through November, though summer months can hit triple digits **Permit** Free; obtain at the Saddlehorn Visitor Center **Contact** nps.gov/colm

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PIZZA IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

For perhaps the best food-and-view combos in the entire NPS, pull up a chair at the Curry Village Pizza Deck in Yosemite Valley and sink your teeth into a crispy pie of oozing mozzarella and piping-hot marinara. Enjoy the view of 7,214-foot Glacier Point and the 5,400-foot Royal Arches cliffband while you binge. **Cost** \$9 to \$20 for a pie **Contact** bit.do/curry-village-pizza

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Traverse a secluded island wilderness.

**ISLAND LOOP,
CUMBERLAND ISLAND
NATIONAL SEASHORE,
GEORGIA**

During the 20th century, Cumberland Island was a tale of contrast: huge, sprawling estates owned by the Carnegie family dominated the southern end, while a segregation-era society of poor African-American laborers known as The Settlement lay in the north. Today, ruined remnants of both communities remain along the island's 50-plus miles of trail. The only access to the island is via a ferry from St. Marys (\$25 round-trip; cumberlandislandferry.com); the lack of vehicles renders Cumberland Island a haven for hikers.

After disembarking at the Dungeness dock, hike 6.1 miles north on the Parallel Trail and fill up at the well before continuing 1.3 miles to Yankee Paradise, a shaded campground close to a beach where sea turtles nest April to August. Spend day two exploring Table Point (9 miles round-trip), a promontory where birders can see species like the wood stork, American oystercatcher, and saltmarsh sparrow. On day three, continue north on the Roller Coaster Trail, passing historic First African Baptist Church (a restored one-room chapel) and the ruins of the old Cumberland Wharf before making camp at Brickhill Bluff (well onsite), a prime vantage point for spotting dolphins and manatees (most active in summer). Next morning, return to the Roller Coaster Trail and retrace your steps 10.6 miles back to Dungeness for the ferry to the mainland. **Distance** 30 miles, 4 days **Trailhead** 30.754002, -81.473655 **Season** Year-round **Permit** \$2/person per night; obtain at the Sea Camp Visitor Center **Contact** nps.gov/cuis

Get lost in a sea of coiled live oak branches 3.5 miles along the Parallel Trail.

PHOTO BY VIKTOR POSNOV





The only American
black bear subspecies
with federal protections
may soon lose them.



THE TEDDY BEAR NEEDS A HUG

***IN LOUISIANA,
A FIGHT IS BREWING
OVER THE COUNTRY'S
MOST ENDANGERED BRUIN.***

BY NICK WELDON

PHOTO BY JOEL SARTORE

“LOOK HERE, HOLT,” TEDDY ROOSEVELT SAID TO HIS GUIDE. “I’M BOUND TO SEE A BEAR THE FIRST DAY.”

The president, like me more than a century later, had high hopes for his maiden foray into the wilds of the Mississippi Delta—except that, being Roosevelt, he wanted to see a bear in order to shoot it. In 1902, this qualified him as a staunch conservationist. His confidence perhaps stemmed from Holt Collier’s résumé: The former slave and Confederate soldier was the region’s most renowned bear hunter, with more than 3,000 kills to his name.

On day one of Roosevelt’s hunt, organized in Mississippi near the Louisiana state line, Collier delivered, using hounds to drive a bear out of thick canebrake and into a stream. After a struggle that left one of his dogs dead and the bear injured, Collier was able to snare the animal and tie it to a tree. Roosevelt was a prolific big game hunter who slew all manner of wild creatures, but evidently even he had his limits. He declined to shoot the defenseless bear.

Roosevelt’s act, in an early 20th century sense, went viral. *The Washington Post* ran a cartoon of the scene titled “Drawing the Line in Mississippi” (see page 72), and a candy maker in Brooklyn got the president’s permission to sell stuffed animals named “Teddy’s Bears.” A cultural sensation was born.

But one detail was rarely reported, then or since. The bear Roosevelt spared was not an average American black bear but *ursus americanus luteolus*, a unique subspecies native to the bottomland hardwood forests of the Lower Mississippi River Valley. Today it’s the state mammal of Louisiana, and known as the Louisiana black bear.

Its distinctions are almost imperceptible to the untrained eye: most notably, a longer, narrower skull and large molar teeth. In the intervening years since Roosevelt’s encounter, hunting and deforestation decimated *luteolus*. By 1992 there were perhaps 150 left, which earned it a spot on the federal endangered species list. Of the 16 American black bear subspecies, only *luteolus* is classified as “threatened.” Indeed, across North America, black bear populations appear to be on the rise, estimated at more than 850,000. Bears in general have become so abundant that 32 of the 41 states with native populations have instituted hunting seasons to manage their numbers.

The Louisiana black bear has experienced its own bounce-back in the last quarter-century, though to a much smaller degree.

Roughly 500 to 750 now roam from East Texas to Mississippi, and in May 2015 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed to delist them. That’s rare. Less than two percent of the more than 2,000 species listed since the passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 have recovered. State agencies in the region and peer reviewers have endorsed the USFWS’s proposal. The proclamation from on high is unambiguously positive: The Teddy Bear is back.

Or is it? Conservation organizations, concerned citizens, and Louisiana black bear experts have cried foul. Many believe that sound science has taken a backseat to political ambition. Could it be a classic case of crooked Louisiana politics?

In order to separate fact from good old-fashioned bayou mythmaking, I needed to get a closer look, on the bear’s home turf. I hoped I could find some answers and—if I was lucky—maybe a bear, too. One of these searches would turn out to be much more difficult than the other.

CRUNCHING AROUND THE EDGE of a parched soy field wasn’t what I had in mind when bear advocate Harold Schoeffler agreed to take me on a hiking tour of the best *luteolus* territory in south-central Louisiana. But bears, it turns out, are fairly undiscerning about habitat when free protein is involved. “I’ve seen ‘em run across this field,” Schoeffler says. The bigger issue is the late-July heat, he warns. With temperatures creeping toward 100, the big galoots will be disinclined to budge from wherever they’re hiding.

None know Louisiana’s wilds, or the plight of its bear, better than Schoeffler. The whip-sharp 75-year-old grew up and still lives in Lafayette, the center of hardscrabble Cajun country, where he chairs the regional Sierra Club. His worldview is a pragmatic marriage of conservationism and capitalism. He hunts duck, geese, squirrel, and rabbit and fishes for brook trout. He poached gators as a youth to make a little side cash and, as an adult, traded in Cadillacs until selling his dealership five years ago. More Roosevelt than Muir, he bristles at being lumped in with the tree-hugging types. “The best environmentalists are outdoorsmen,” he says.

Few have had more success advocating for

the Louisiana environment: Schoeffler, to put it bluntly, knows how to get what he wants. At age 11 he watched his favorite fishing spot in Vermilion Bay get destroyed by shell dredging and vowed to one day “put those bastards out of business,” which he effectively did in the early ‘90s after leading a David-versus-Goliath fight against the offenders that went all the way to the Louisiana Supreme Court.

For the bear, he’s been a tireless advocate. It was his 1991 lawsuit against the USFWS that led to *luteolus* being listed in the first place, and his again in 2005 that ultimately forced the designation of 1.2 million acres of critical habitat—which mandates an assessment of habitat and limits federal activity on that land. Much of this habitat will lose protection if the bear is delisted. If the Service, which is not expected to make a final decision before early 2016, decides to go forth with delisting, Schoeffler says he’ll consider suing them again. If so, *luteolus* could follow the paths of the grizzly bear and gray wolf, populations of which were delisted in recent years only to be relisted following lawsuits. “The bear can’t speak for itself,” Schoeffler says.

In 1995, the USFWS established three criteria for considering delisting *luteolus*: having two viable subpopulations of the bear, a corridor of habitat linking these groups, and assuring the long-term protection of their habitat and the connecting corridor. The USFWS and Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) believe they have met these goals. Not only has the bear population recovered several-fold from its pre-listing nadir, but a combination of public lands and private easements have permanently protected 638,000 acres of habitat, almost triple what existed prior to listing.

These figures, however, are mere fractions of what Ron Nowak, a former USFWS endangered species biologist, estimates was a pre-colonization population of 80,000 across 76.8 million acres—something Schoeffler is quick to point out.

“The media has bought this bullshit feel-good story,” Schoeffler says. “Nobody can read these numbers . . . and say we’ve saved the bear.”

At the edge of the soy field, Schoeffler, wearing a pocketed shirt and well-worn blue jeans, crouches and points at the dirt. There’s a wide impression sunken into the earth, bigger than the meandering hog and deer tracks we’d been following. He nods at a swipe of dried mud across the tall grass at the edge of the woods: “They go into here.” We step out of the sun-beaten field and under the cooling canopy and see an impressive network of wide dirt paths which, to me, look like hiking trails. “Bear trails,” Schoeffler corrects me. They look wide enough for a four-wheeler, and they’re booby-trapped with large webs spun by long-legged banana spiders. But we see no other signs of *luteolus*. Schoeffler, like any good hunter, uses few words in the woods, so when it’s time to move on to another bear haunt, he just starts walking away, and I follow.



Above: Harold Schoeffler filed the 1991 lawsuit that led to federal protection for the Louisiana black bear. Left: Avery Island bears are often photographed by local residents.

SINCE THE LOUISIANA BLACK BEAR was officially listed on January 7, 1992, the responsibility of rehabilitating it has been shared among the USFWS, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, and third parties like the state's Black Bear Conservation Coalition. Schoeffler and other critics of the delisting proposal say that state wildlife agents have bristled at the presence of their federal overseers from the jump and that this uneasy relationship has been one reason the bear delisting has been expedited.

Jeff Weller, the USFWS field supervisor in Louisiana, denies that such a tension exists, and credits the state's role in previously getting the American alligator, bald eagle, and brown pelican delisted. "I've never experienced any kind of stress or pushback from the state. . . . Regardless of what our colleagues say, or what current politicians at any level of government may say, we have to base our decision on the science. Not on external pressures."

It's hard to argue with such a facts-first approach, but on the ground, Schoeffler and

I find things aren't so black and white. After our soy-field excursion, Schoeffler decides to search in the Bayou Teche National Wildlife Refuge. He peels off of the asphalt of rural LA 317 where a small sign with a blue goose points down a dirt road. We rumble a ways until we see another sign marking one segment of the refuge. The ground behind it is thick with bamboo and palmettos that look like leftovers from the Jurassic Period. The cover from ancient oaks and new-growth trees blots out the sun. It would be prime bear-stalking territory—if not for the red *NO TRESPASSING* notice. At the bottom of the Bayou Teche sign, next to where it identifies this refuge as dedicated Louisiana black bear habitat that's open to the public, there's a phone number listed. Schoeffler calls it. "Line's disconnected."

We continue, traversing much of the bears' stomping ground in the Lower Atchafalaya River Basin. The habitat here, near the coast, is extremely fragmented by development. Still, this region supports the second-largest of four breeding bear subpopulations in the state despite providing the fewest acres. We see snakes and deer and monstrous "devil's horse" grasshoppers, hear the croak of gators camouflaged among swampy cypress knees, and come upon scat in a cane field that Schoeffler attributes to a coyote, but we find no bears.

Schoeffler would like to see 3,000 Louisiana black bears from East Texas to Mississippi, rather than the current 500 to 750, before lifting federal protections. His worry is that populations are still fragile enough to be drastically impacted by the whims of state administrations. "Delisting the bear puts it in the hands of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, which works for the governor," he says. If a given governor is less inclined to, say, prosecute poachers, the bear's security could go south in a hurry. (It remains to be seen how governor-elect John Bel Edwards will handle the bear issue.)

It's not hard to see why skeptics suspect politics are at play. The 1995 recovery plan, for example, estimated that USFWS would meet its criteria in 2025; in a country numb to jokes about government inefficiency, here is an agency claiming it has gotten the job done a decade ahead of schedule. And ex-governor Bobby Jindal, evidently eager to attach himself to the delisting before his term ended (and when his run for the presidency still seemed viable), treated it as an inevitability in a press conference last May, before the public or any peer reviewers had been given a chance to vet the proposal.

"Today, after 20 years of collaborative research and recovery efforts," Jindal said while standing in front of the governor's mansion, "we are proud to finally announce the recovery of the Louisiana black bear."

THE BEAR'S FATE could carry ramifications for countless other species. Large mammals

require more comprehensive conservation efforts, and what benefits them often tangentially helps smaller, more obscure critters.

Paul Davidson has a keen understanding of the risks and rewards of delisting. The Louisiana State-educated biologist has dedicated the last 23 years of his life to the recovery effort as the executive director of the Black Bear Conservation Coalition (BBCC), a public-private group formed in the wake of the bear's listing. With past experience as a crawfish farmer and in leading the Baton Rouge Clean Air Coalition, he's made a career out of being a mediator for different stakeholders on environmental issues. Davidson actually believes bear populations are healthy enough for delisting. "My issue," he says, "is habitat."

In late summer, I join Davidson to explore bear territory circumscribed by the Red, Atchafalaya, and Mississippi Rivers. He's a thin, affable 66-year-old, with a graying mop of hair and horseshoe mustache. His T-shirt says "Don't Feed Bears."

Davidson's years patrolling bear habitat have made him a walking field guide. During our hike in the sprawling, 70,000-acre Richard K. Yancey Wildlife Management Area—a lush preserve devoid of trails and dotted with ponds and bayous under an umbrella of pecans, oaks, and other hardwoods—he whispers the names of all flora and fauna within view. Little blue herons. Mississippi kite. Red-shouldered hawk. Overcup oak. Nuttall oak. At the edge of an oxbow lake, we push through brambles hoping to get a view of a watering bear.

When you combine public lands like Yancey and Bayou Teche with easements bought on private property, you get a protected range that cuts roughly down the middle of the state. The portion of this habitat between the Tensas and Atchafalaya River basins is the so-called "corridor" that the USFWS says supports crossover between the state's two viable breeding subpopulations (the other two subpopulations weren't the main focus of recovery efforts). Passing smack through the middle of it, we see only pockets of trees broken up by swaths of farmland.

"There's a lot more open land than there is forest," Davidson says. "You certainly can't show me a corridor on a map that's some sort of linear green belt. That doesn't exist."

I put this concern to Debbie Fuller, the USFWS biologist who authored the delisting proposal, and she explained that "[bears] are way more flexible and generalistic than people understand." The delisting proposal goes further to explain the wide range of habitats bears can occupy beyond large-tract forests: marshes, wooded spoil banks along bayous, salt domes and—yes—agricultural fields.



These days, Davidson is a one-man show—at most he led a staff of three—and his priority is education. He estimates 50,000 people have seen one of his presentations. He also oversees the rehabilitation of 750 acres of habitat a year through tree planting. But the Black Bear Conservation Coalition's larger role in managing the bear was curtailed after Jindal appointed Robert Barham as his LDWF secretary in 2008. Barham has spent much of his tenure advocating for the state's first bear hunt since 1988. The BBCC clashed with LDWF over the issue, Davidson says, leading to a falling out.

INTERESTINGLY, MANY FOLKS HERE are quick to self-identify as hunters in one breath and oppose the delisting in the next. When I called a state police official to get a count on the number of "Save the Louisiana Black Bear" license plates the state has sold—8,100, for what

In the name of bear recovery, Paul Davidson united groups ranging from big timber to the Sierra Club. Bottom: the Roosevelt cartoon.

it's worth—the guy on the phone volunteered that he was a hunter who wanted to keep the bear federally protected. "There are plenty of other animals you can hunt," he said.

Still, the allure of slaying a bear persists. Florida hunters just had their first black bear season in more than two decades and killed 298 animals in 48 hours. Perhaps this was the demographic Jindal was appealing to at his press conference last May. The closing speaker—none other than Teddy Roosevelt IV—spent several minutes detailing the hunting exploits of his great-grandfather and Holt Collier.

It was an odd ending note for an occasion marking an achievement of conservation, but in the same spirit as the time two years ago when the LDWF served meat from a euthanized nuisance bear at a Hunting and Fishing Day event in Baton Rouge. I asked the LDWF's deputy secretary about the menu and he said that they were teaching hunters about conservation, "which includes utilizing the entire animal when choosing to harvest an animal."

Even if the bear gets delisted, Louisiana would be many years away from a sanctioned hunt. Fuller, the delisting proposal's author, says there would be at least a seven-year federal monitoring period during which no hunting could occur.

In the meantime, the modest gains made by the Louisiana black bear have led to an increase in human-bear interactions. As Davidson drives in the direction of a beaver pond in hopes of happening upon a thirsty bear, he points out that the Yancey Wildlife Management Area used to be one of his release points when he oversaw the state's nuisance bear program. Relocation rarely kept bears from returning to their home territory, though, so he began using rubber shot and Black Mouth Curs to "haze" them out of residential areas. He laments that since the state relieved him of those duties in 2008, euthanization has become more common. (According to

the LDWF, the state has never had a bear injure a person.)

"Bears aren't the evil, man-eating, dog-eating critters they're made out to be," Davidson says. "Cows kill more people than bears. *Vending machines* kill more people than bears. Fear is a powerful marketing tool."

But as he leads me on foot into a dry stretch of forest, a carpet of leaves crunching beneath our feet, I begin to feel that marketing message wash over me. The hair on the back of my neck stands up and I contemplate how I'll react if I see a bear. Will I run?

Davidson moves quietly and purposefully, following tangents only he can see, leading me to the beaver pond. We look past the cypresses at water's edge and scan the pond's perimeter for a bear. There's no sound but the whir of a thousand cicadas. After a moment, he sighs. "They're secretive."

RON NOWAK HAS a compromise for the politicians hankering for a hunt: Shoot the bears in the Upper Atchafalaya and spare the rest. Those bears, he asserts, “pose the most insidious threat that there can be: the loss of the genome.”

Nowak, 72, isn’t a heartless killer—far from it. In fact, the former USFWS endangered species biologist is the man responsible for sparking Schoeffler’s interest in the bear years ago. The New Orleans native’s 1980s research on the *luteolus* subspecies laid the foundation for much of the work that’s been done in the years since, and his crusade to get the bear listed started all the way back when the USFWS first hired him in 1973.

Now in semi-retirement in the D.C. area, Nowak has a bombshell that could invalidate the entire delisting proposal: Those Upper Atchafalaya bears, one of the Service’s viable subpopulations, may not even be Louisiana black bears. In the 1960s the LDWF relocated American black bears from Minnesota into the area. The Service has downplayed the influence of these bears, but Nowak contends that recent genetic research proves the bears in this area today are descendants of the Minnesota bears. (Any American black bear that wanders into the state enjoys the same protections as Louisiana black bears, since the subspecies are too hard for a hunter to tell apart.) Through hybridization, these bears could hypothetically wipe out the traits that make the *luteolus* subspecies unique—and without *luteolus* traits, there is no Louisiana black bear. “You can’t take something else from somewhere else and put

it down there and suddenly say, “This is the Louisiana black bear, too,” Nowak says. “It’s not. It’s not biologically, and it’s not legally.”

Nowak iterated these points in a 25-page rebuttal that he submitted when the delisting proposal was posted online for public comment last summer. Fuller, the proposal’s author, is currently in the process of reviewing his along with all other comments, which were overwhelmingly anti-delisting. “That’s a very serious comment and we’re taking it seriously,” she says. Translation: If any one issue can unravel the delisting process, this is it.

There is one subpopulation of the bear that, by virtue of its geographic isolation, is both irrefutably *luteolus* but also in imminent danger: the Lower Atchafalaya bears that Schoeffler and I failed to spy in July. Since 1992, 246 bears have been killed in Louisiana by cars—far more than by any other cause—and many of these accidents have been along US 90 near the coast. Because of the threat of the automobiles, and, in the long-term, rising seas, these coastal bears are the most vulnerable subpopulation, but no permanent protection for them is required for *luteolus* to be delisted.

I make one more attempt to see a coastal bear, in the fall, when cooler weather should increase my odds. I head to Avery Island, source of the famed Tabasco pepper sauce, and home to a much-loved population of native bears.

The “island” is actually a 2,200-acre salt dome surrounded by a sea of marshland. I avoid the most-trodden paths and soon come upon a heap of munched-on acorns at the

edge of a thicket. I crouch, becoming keenly aware of every crunch, crackle, and groan around me. Not far away, I find telltale bear tracks—deep and fringed with claw marks. I’m alone this time, and my heart races at the thought of running into my first wild bear.

I don’t, which probably should come as no surprise at this point. But after hiking all over the state, I’ve come to learn a truth about top-of-the-food-chain wildlife. As with wolves and mountain lions, just knowing they’re out there changes the landscape, makes it more exciting, more wild.

FOR THE SAKE OF trying to eyeball the traits that distinguish the Louisiana black bear, I make one other trip, to the only place I’m certain I’ll find one: the zoo.

Audubon Zoo, nestled among the oaks of Uptown New Orleans, is home to Betsy and Camille, two 15-year-old bears named for a pair of devastating hurricanes. One placard at their exhibit tells the story of the Teddy Bear, while another identifies them as Louisiana black bears. A family giggles as one wallows in the shade and the other scratches its back. I try to make out the defining *luteolus* trait—the narrow, long skull—and convince myself that Betsy and Camille have it. Of course I’m wrong, which I learn when I meet with exhibit curator Rick Atkinson. There, he admits that these are not *luteolus* at all—they’re American black bears he bought from a wildlife park in South Dakota.

“I feel a tad guilty not having a Louisiana black bear,” Atkinson says, and he has reasons—for one, he says, they’d likely be bears in need of rehabilitation resources the zoo can’t provide. He also expresses lament at the placard misidentifying them as Louisiana black bears: “I’m not happy with our graphic... I keep being told that they’re expensive [to replace].”

I think about the family chuckling at Betsy and Camille, though, and wonder: If nobody can tell the difference between an American black bear and a Louisiana black bear, who cares?

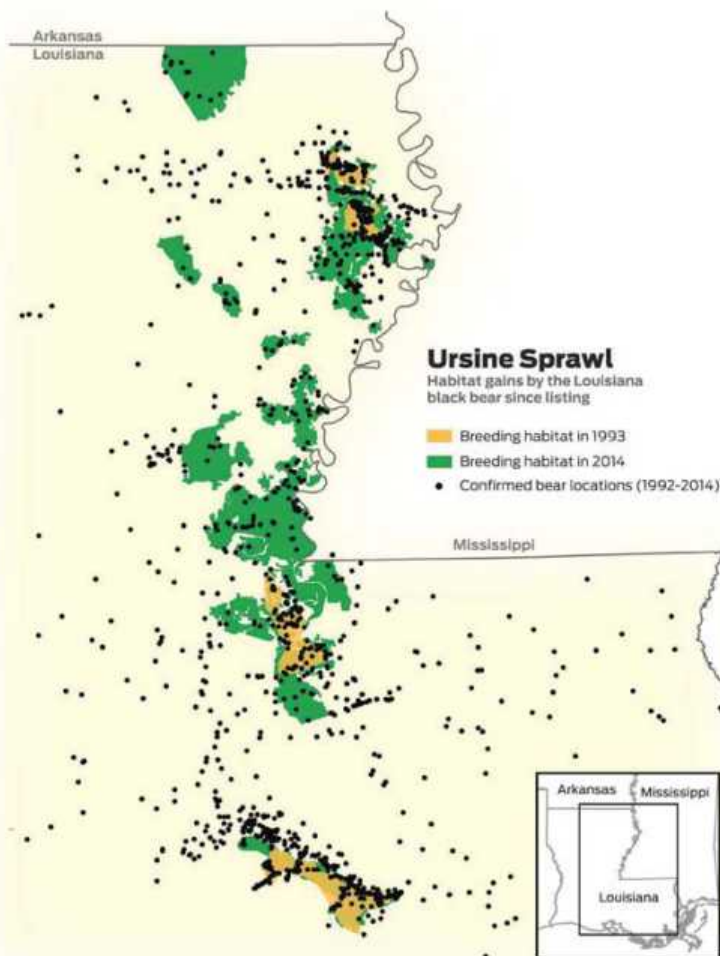
I asked Schoeffler this weeks earlier, on our drive back from the coast. He more than anyone can claim the moral high ground on this issue, and when he clambered into his bully pulpit, he sounded less like the chairman of the local Sierra Club and more like a preacher.

“The Louisiana black bear is a symbol of our Southern wilderness,” he said, chewing on the words. “Its recovery is an atonement for our sins.”

He’s not grieving, he’s challenging his fellow Louisianians: Here, in spite of all the damage we’ve done to our Gulf and our swamp and our forests, is an opportunity to take care of a species that spiritually and biologically belongs to Louisiana. If we can’t take care of this one animal, what hope does that give us in the face of hurricanes, oil spills, rising seas?

Maybe the Louisiana black bear has recovered, and maybe it hasn’t, but one thing is certain: when it’s gone, it’s gone. And the only thing left will be a story about a stuffed toy. ■

Nick Weldon lives in New Orleans. On his failed quest to see a Louisiana black bear, he did see a wild hog.






If you've dreamed of
a career in the outdoors,
now's the time to make it real.

BY SARAH L. STEWART

THEY CALL



Stationed: A Mt. Rainier
climbing ranger (see
page 80) takes in the
view of Mt. Adams.

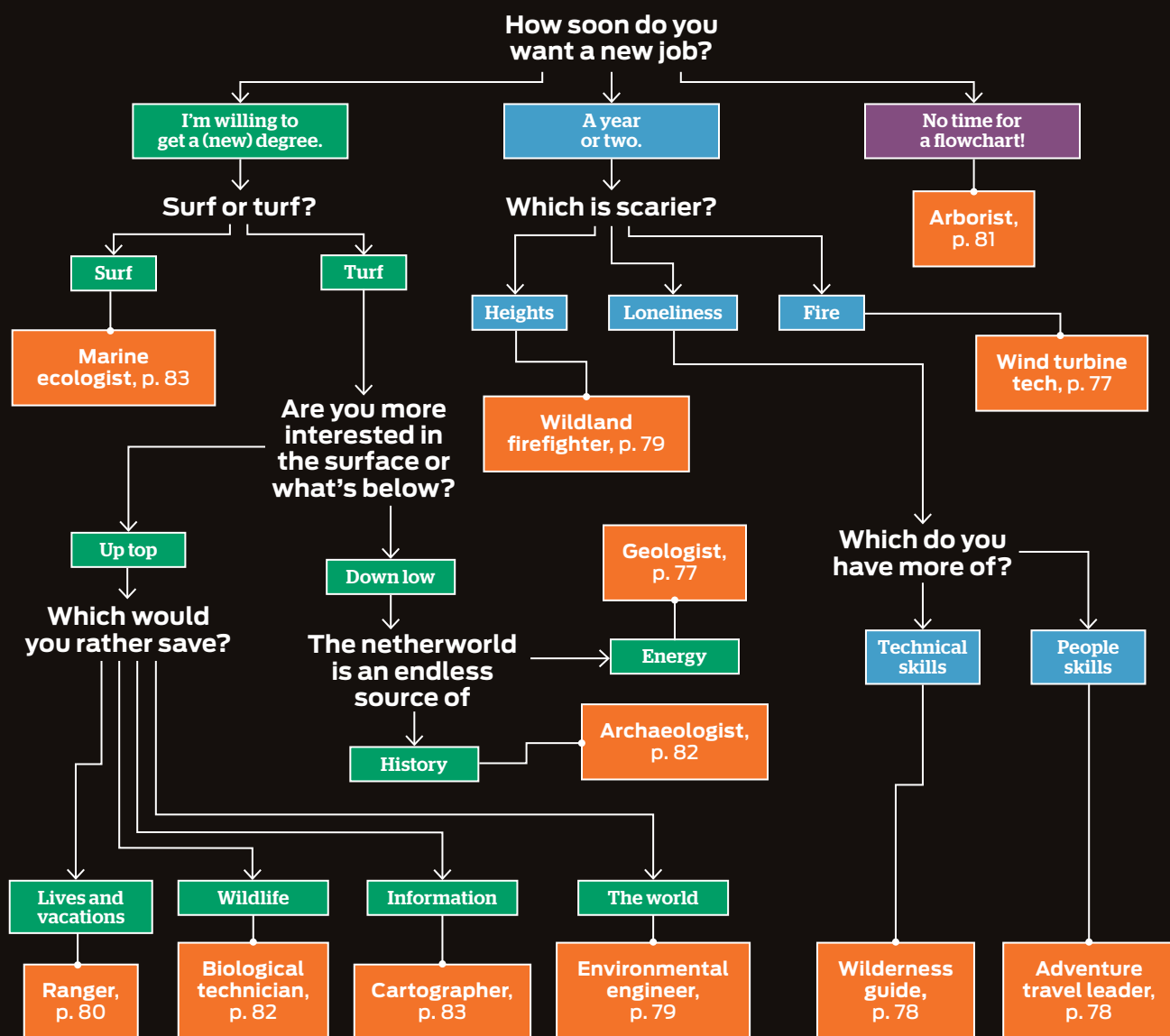


THIS WORK?

WITH ECONOMISTS DECLARING that job openings and hires have returned to pre-recession levels, now's the best time in about a decade to seriously consider ditching your desk job. We've identified a dozen different outdoor gigs to help you do just that, and gleaned insights from people who are already living the dream. Some of these jobs pay well, some are in high demand, and some are just so drool-worthy we couldn't resist. What constitutes the perfect job? That's up to you.

This way to your future!

Don't compromise your dream. Start here to find a good job that best fits your interests, lifestyle, and timeline.



How We Chose We crunched numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics to figure out which careers are the most promising, based on an average growth of 11 percent by the year 2022. Unless otherwise noted, salaries cited are 2014 median annual income as reported by the BLS; job outlooks are based on 2012 BLS figures, the most recent data available.

POWER PLAYERS | Pull forth the energy that lights our lives.



Wind Turbine Technician

Harrison Gatos, 24
UpWind Solutions / Burlington, VT

→ This could be the quickest cure for the common desk job: Demand for wind techs is high, pay is decent, technical school can get you on the job in as little as two years, and, unlike excavating fossil fuels, it's the future of sustainable energy. This niche industry will add about 800 new jobs in the next decade, mostly in windy states like Texas, California, and Wyoming, as well as the Midwest. The catch: Your office will be 300 feet above the ground on exposed platforms, in mechanical compartments, or even dangling in midair.

As a rope access technician, Harrison Gatos maneuvers by rope and harness to inspect, repair, and retrofit turbine blades, completing four- to eight-week deployments at wind farms from Kansas to Pennsylvania. Working "uptower" can be cold, windy (ya think?), and isolating—due to the grueling travel schedule—but it's not all bad. "You get some really good views up there," Gatos says. (His favorite: A golden sunrise over rural Indiana.) And like many wind techs, Gatos works seasonally, earning his year's pay from March through November.

PAY \$49,000 **PREREQUISITES** A good head for heights **PERKS** Seasonal work at full-time pay **PROBLEMS** Suitcase living **PROSPECTS** 4,000 jobs by 2022 (+24%)



A technician checks lightning strike data.

Research Geologist

→ Like it or not, 90 percent of our energy still comes from the ground beneath our feet. The upshot for geoscientists? Job security. The market is strong for earth science experts—which include not just geologists, but also oceanographers, geophysicists, and seismologists.

Newer energy exploits such as horizontal drilling (think: shale development) and hydraulic fracturing (fracking) are primarily driving demand—and offering the biggest paydays, averaging \$147,000 for geoscientists working in oil and gas extraction.

But you don't have to hunt for fossil fuels for a private company to make a decent living as a geologist. Though more than half of geoscientists work in the private sector, 14 percent are state or federal government employees, working for agencies such as the USGS. These scientists average \$67,000 (state) to \$98,000 (federal) per year—pretty good scratch considering their work can take them to some of the most remote and pristine corners of the country. The catch: These careers require at least a master's (and ideally a doctorate), so they're best for those with time and resources for the schooling.

PAY \$90,000 (average) **PREREQUISITES** Ph.D. preferred **PERKS** Backcountry bliss **PROBLEMS** Paperwork; carbon **PROSPECTS** 44,200 jobs by 2022 (+16%)



WHY I LOVE MY JOB

Julie Dumoulin, 60
U.S. Geological Survey / Anchorage, AK

Research geologist Julie Dumoulin has worked for the USGS Alaska Science Center since 1979, spending summers armed with hammers, a Brunton

compass, and a bolt-action rifle; sleeping in a tent among the thousands-strong caribou herds of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; and leapfrogging around the Brooks Range—all so land managers can better understand the resources beneath their feet.

But it's not all a highlight reel. In the field, bad weather can spell misery—and a layer of grime comes with the gig.

"Sometimes you just are completely covered with black dust, like you've been down in a coal mine," Dumoulin says.



PEOPLE PEOPLE

Endless personability makes your life an endless vacation.



Adventure Travel Leader

John Baston, 49
Mountain Travel Sobek / Emeryville, CA

→ The next best thing to going on vacation? Getting paid to go on someone else's. Full disclosure: With just 4 percent growth through 2022, travel guides will have slim pickings for jobs, and many of them are seasonal. But dreamers gonna dream, and those willing to pay their dues can and do turn this fantasy gig into a real paycheck.

Trip leader John Baston travels a third

of the year—from hiking the Sonoran Desert during spring wildflower bloom to spotting grizzlies gorging on Alaska's summer salmon run. When he's not paddling with a pod of killer whales or watching wolf pups frolic on a deserted Alaskan beach, Baston scouts future locales and plans his next custom trips from his Bay Area office.

While solid outdoor chops are a must

for adventure guides (Baston logged a decade as a park ranger), social skills are equally important. "You have to be able to listen to people and be sincerely interested in their stories," he says.

PAY \$35,000 **PREREQUISITES** People skills **PERKS** See the world **PROBLEMS** If you're awake, you're working **PROSPECTS** 5,900 jobs by 2022 (+3.6%)

Wilderness Guide

→ They say if you do what you love, you'll never work a day in your life. Too good to be true, right? Probably—unless you're a wilderness guide. These life hackers get paid to show others how to do the things they love most, be it rock climbing, mountaineering, backpacking, or fly fishing.

Regardless of your chosen expertise, you'll need patience, people skills, and a mastery of the craft. It's not a get-rich-quick scheme—starting guides often earn less than \$100 per day—but enterprising folks can turn passion into profit.

PAY Highly variable **PREREQUISITES** Outdoor expertise, patience **PERKS** Do what you love all day **PROBLEMS** Bad weather, bad tippers **PROSPECTS** no stats available



WHY I LOVE MY JOB

Charity Rutter, 46
R&R Fly Fishing /
Townsend, TN

By age 29, Charity Rutter's stressful advertising job had fast-tracked her to a type of thyroid disease that doesn't usually appear until middle age. Now, she spends her days along the trout streams of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, teaching anglers to cast, set hooks, and read the water.

"I don't think there is a more

spiritual place in the world than standing in a river," Rutter says.

Point taken, but to make a living as a guide, you've got to be a bit of a backcountry badass: Rutter can predict when and where a fish will hit a fly before it happens.

A successful self-employed guide also needs business acumen and customer service skills.

"You should have to be a waiter or waitress for at least six months before they even try to be a guide," Rutter says. "So much of being a guide is in the way you take care of people."



Fishing guides find the goods.



PROBLEM SOLVERS

Things go wrong.
That's where you come in.

Firefighters carry their gear into the field.



Wildland Firefighter

→ Think of your current job title. Now consider this one: Hotshot. Heady stuff, right? So is the job description for hotshots, the elite group of wildland firefighters who deploy to fire zones around the country to defend wild spaces.

In recent years, fighting wildland fires has become more important than ever: More than 9 million acres burned in 2015, nearing the all-time record set in 2006. Though the goal is the same, the job description varies depending on the type of firefighting crew, including helitack crews and smokejumpers who attack from above, truck-based engine crews, and hand crews that construct fire lines.

On the frontlines, wildland firefighters battle the blazes during 16-hour days, two weeks at a time, lugging 50-pound packs into the backcountry, and cutting and removing vegetation. Wages start low, but overtime adds up quick.

Saving homes and wilderness under brutal working conditions builds camaraderie. Together, crews endure rigorous training and field deployments that leave them reeking so thoroughly of woods and smoke that animals sometimes walk right past them.

PAY \$11 per hour (starting) **PREREQUISITES** Superior physical fitness **PERKS** Bragging rights **PROBLEMS** Time away from home **PROSPECTS** no stats available



WHY I LOVE MY JOB

Craig Cunningham, 32
Ruby Mountain Interagency
Hotshot Crew / Elko, NV

Craig Cunningham has been fighting wildfires since he was a teenager. Now he heads a Nevada-based hotshot crew that battles the country's most difficult fires, including north of the Arctic Circle, in every western state, and national parks.

And they do it hiker style, trekking their gear up to 15 miles each day, sleeping under the stars on space blankets, and hiking to the fire line in the morning.



Environmental Engineer

Lisa Denmark, 36
Environmental Protection Agency
/ Philadelphia, PA

→ While the rest of us bemoan the damage we've done to our planet, environmental engineers actually do something about it. From designing wastewater treatment plants to mopping up hazmat spills, they're paid (rather handsomely) to clean up other people's messes. And we live in a messy world.

Lisa Denmark oversees cleanup of federal Superfund (polluted) sites throughout the mid-Atlantic region, work that includes taking water samples from nearby homes, informing residents about contaminants, and overseeing contractors completing the physical cleanup. In previous positions, she's handled spills ranging from mercury to milk (yes, milk; it was in a river) and gathered soil, water, and air samples from chemical tanks to wastewater ponds.

"You name it, I've probably been up to my knees in it," Denmark says. Sexy? No. Though her work often takes place outdoors, it isn't usually in unspoiled or even very pretty places. But Denmark finds satisfaction in leaving the land better than she found it.

"I have something to do with people having safe air to breathe and water to drink, and ensuring their kids are playing in clean dirt," she says.

PAY \$83,000 **PREREQUISITES** At least a bachelor's degree, ideally a master's **PERKS** Save the world **PROBLEMS** Bureaucracy **PROSPECTS** 61,400 jobs by 2022 (+15%)

PUBLIC SERVANTS

Safety, service, and a helping hand are your trademarks.

Park Ranger

→ If income were measured in views per hour rather than dollars, NPS rangers would be wealthier than Warren Buffet. They clock in at our country's most sanctified natural spaces, working in the shadow of Half Dome, the rainforests of Olympic, the depths of the Grand Canyon.

Most rangers are in it for the love: Permanent positions start at around \$28,000 (for interpretive rangers) to \$35,000 (law enforcement). And while prospects for all recreation workers—a broad category that also includes gigs like camp directors, city park employees, and rec center staff—should grow 14 percent through 2022 (adding 49,000 jobs), competition for NPS ranger positions will remain stiff and subject to federal budgetary whims.

But don't let that discourage the Junior Ranger inside of you. Grown-ups with a dream and determination can make a career as a park ranger; you'll also need a bachelor's degree (ideally environmental science or criminal justice, but many other majors can work) and a willingness to accept volunteer or seasonal positions enroute to permanent employment.

PAY \$28,000 to \$35,000 **PREREQUISITES** Bachelor's degree **PERKS** Best office ever **PROBLEMS** Budget cuts **PROSPECTS** Competitive; no BLS data



WHY I LOVE MY JOB

Michelle Schonzeit, 34

Independence National Historical Park / Philadelphia, PA

In her 13 years with the Park Service, Michelle Schonzeit has rescued a climber from Yosemite's El Capitan, nabbed elk poachers in Crater Lake, saved a young boy from a waterfall at Delaware Water Gap, and been stalked step-for-step by a mountain lion while on solo patrol deep in the Olympic backcountry. "Every day is a little bit different," she says.

A ranger's job is by definition unpredictable—and so is the weather they withstand. "There are no snow days for park rangers," Schonzeit says.

Her advice to wannabes? Keep an open mind, because you likely won't start at your dream park. "Be willing to go anywhere."

REALITY CHECK: PAY UP

The most iconic outdoor jobs have one thing in common: To get one, you'll have to pay your dues. Though no two paths are identical, here's a sample of the hoop-jumping associated with a few of the faves.

Mountain Guide

1. Climb. Ski. Repeat as needed until second nature. 2. Take an 80-hour Wilderness First Responder/CPR course (\$595 and up). 3. Go to guide college (optional), like the Mountain Training School (4.5 years; \$146,000). 4. Get a part-time job at a gear shop. 5. Move in with your parents, or five of your closest pals. 6. Go global: Become a certified American Mountain Guide (90+ days of rock, alpine, and ski guide training; about \$27,000) to guide legally in more than 20 countries worldwide.

River Guide

1. Get a leg up with Wilderness First Responder/CPR certification. 2. Complete on-river training through a rafting outfitter (three weeks, \$450). 3. Work seasonally as a raft guide from May until Labor Day. Earn about \$60/day your first year, or \$4,000 per season including tips. 4. Get an off-season gig to make ends meet. Ideas: Teacher, ski instructor, Christmas tree salesperson (really). 5. Repeat. After five years, you'll earn about \$8,000 per season.

Park Ranger

1. Get some schooling (see left for details). 2. Volunteer at a national park during the summers. 3. Complete training through the NPS Seasonal Law Enforcement Training Program (650+ hours; \$4,500 and up) or Interpretive Development Program (time and costs vary). 4. Apply for seasonal park ranger gigs at usajobs.gov. 5. Go wherever the job dictates.



A ranger patrols Great Sand Dunes National Park.

30% • fish and game warden / \$48,070 / 1.2% • fisherman / \$33,430 / -5% • fitness trainer / \$31,720 / 12.5% • forester



Arborist

Mark Chisholm, 45
Aspen Tree Expert Co. / Jackson, NJ

→ Good news for all childhood tree-climbing prodigies: Now's a great time to go pro. As cities plant more trees in an effort to green up urban spaces, demand for workers to prune and care for them (and keep them from falling on people or property) is expected to swell.

Despite a median wage of \$16 per hour (\$33,000 annually), the top tier of arborists earn around \$54,000 per year—and potentially much more for those who start their own tree-care business. And because most training occurs on the job, anyone with the desire and physical ability can become an arborist with no educational prereqs.

Downside: Climbing trees with chainsaws and lowering multiton limbs to the ground doesn't leave a lot of room for error. On average, nearly six arborists die each month in the U.S., usually the victims of falling or being struck by errant branches or equipment.

While much of the pruning, climbing, and disease-treating takes place in city and suburb, certain rarefied assignments sound mind-blowingly cool. Mark Chisholm, a third-generation arborist, speaks of pruning a 260-foot-tall California redwood with a reverence that would make the Lorax proud. Because to be an arborist, you have to be more than a tree climber—you've got to be a bit of a tree hugger, too.

"Without trees, we're not going to be able to survive," Chisholm says. "Arborists make it possible for people to coexist with trees."

PAY \$33,000 **PREREQUISITES** Strength, agility **PERKS** Birds'-eye views, power tools **PROBLEMS** Gravity, power tools **PROSPECTS** 63,000 jobs by 2022 (+18.5%)



For an arborist, it's all saws, ropes, and safety.

Working Outside 101

The first rule of the wilderness: Be prepared. Same goes for getting a job in the great outdoors.

STUDY There's no one-size-fits-all degree for outdoor work, but a science background is a great start (good choices for major: wildlife biology, forestry, and environmental science).

Many community colleges and universities also offer outdoor recreation or education degrees; even certifications like wilderness first aid or Leave No Trace can give you a leg up on the competition. OutdoorEd.com is a good one-stop resource.

LEVERAGE Market the skills you already have—and not just your

backcountry abilities, though those will come in handy, too. Are you a people person? Have a head for numbers or words? Many of the same skills and talents you use at your job are important in the outdoors.

VOLUNTEER The best way to get paid to do what you love? Start by doing what you love for

free. Help out with an archaeological dig or marine research expedition, volunteer for the park service or a firefighting squad, do trail maintenance or join an unpaid ski patrol. You'll gain not only hands-on experience in your field of interest, but also contacts that can lead to real jobs down the road. Get started at volunteer.gov.



DATA HUNTERS

The world is just
so darn interesting.



Archaeologists
unearth ancient
secrets.



Archaeologist

Corinne Springer, 59
Natural History Museum of Utah / Price, UT

→ If solitude tops your list of backcountry must-haves and your powers of perception rival a CSI sleuth's, consider becoming an archaeologist. You'll earn about \$59,000 a year and enjoy a 19 percent boost in job opportunities in the next decade. Best of all, no annoying colleagues—most of the people you'll see at work have been dead for ages.

"Archaeologists are routinely in the middle of nowhere," says Corinne Springer, who manages a remote, off-the-grid field station in east-central Utah. "We're a strange bunch. There are a lot of loners."

Archaeologists work for a variety of employers, from federal agencies like the NPS to cultural resource management firms that assess impacts before construction. Springer spends half the year in a 20-mile-long canyon renowned for its more than 600 archaeological sites, located 2.5 hours from the nearest town. Though she regularly hosts research teams, for the most part Springer is alone among the arrowheads, pottery, and ruins left in the canyon by the Fremont people 1,000 years ago.

And that's just how she likes it. When she isn't tending to field station chores (gardening, roofing, horse wrangling), Springer combs the canyon looking for artifacts. To her, they're clues to understanding how the Fremont people lived—and why they vanished from the area. She spends the winter reviewing her findings and writing reports at her Salt Lake City office, then returns to the canyon as soon as weather permits to continue unraveling the mysteries of its ancient inhabitants.

"Who knows how long it will take to exhaust the potential of this place," says Springer, who didn't achieve her fourth-grade dream of becoming an archaeologist until her early 40s. "I'm going to stay until they kick me out of here."

PAY \$59,000 **PREREQUISITES** Master's degree **PERKS** Solitude, scenery **PROBLEMS** Paper pushing **PROSPECTS** 8,600 jobs by 2022 (+19%)

Biological Technician

→ Say you have a penchant for biology, but you don't have the Ph.D. necessary to score a research position at a university or government agency—or at this stage in your career, a spare decade to get one. As a biological technician, you can contribute to science without cashing in your 401(k) to spend on tuition. With a bachelor's degree in biology or a related field, you'll earn about \$41,000 a year doing hands-on work assisting scientists with lab experiments and field research.

PAY \$41,000 **PREREQUISITES** Bachelor's degree **PERKS** Contributing to science **PROBLEMS** Early mornings **PROSPECTS** 88,300 jobs by 2022 (+10%)



WHY I LOVE MY JOB

Rick McIntyre, 66
Yellowstone National Park /
Silver Gate, MT

While many biological technicians work in laboratories, Rick McIntyre has spent his career in the most enchanting of settings: watching wolves in Yellowstone.

McIntyre rises each morning as early as 3:15 a.m. to be in the field a half hour before sunrise. He locates the wolves using radio telemetry, then reports everything they do—every howl, every kill, every mating act—into a tape recorder, which

he types into notes at home. He braves winter temperatures as low as -52°F, and heartbreak when hunters shoot his subjects, which is legal beyond park boundaries. He also shares his knowledge and love of the wolves with the public, giving impromptu lectures at roadside pullouts and programs for local and visiting schoolchildren.

"I have a job that I love so much, it would be punishment for me to take a day off," McIntyre says. "I don't want to miss anything."

He hasn't missed much: On his longest streak, McIntyre was in the field every day for more than 15 years and saw at least one wolf for 890 days straight.

lifeguards, ski patrol, etc. / \$18,950 / 10.2% • photographer / \$28,490 / 4.3% • rock splitter / \$32,280 / 17.4% •



Cartographer

Larry Garland, 64
Appalachian Mountain Club / Gorham, NH

→ Some are calling it the new golden age of cartography: Map-making hasn't been this relevant since Columbus landed in the New World 500 years ago. The advent of digital geographic data and our desire to pinpoint our precise location anytime, anywhere have made this old-school profession suddenly very modern. GPS units and computer software have replaced pencils and drawing compasses, and the smartphone has become an unabridged pocket atlas, while our daily reliance on maps has exploded.

Demand for new and updated mobile, web-based, and interactive maps will drive a 20 percent growth in the market for cartographers and photogrammetrists (who take measurements from photographs for maps) in the next decade. Mappers earn \$61,000 per year—with a bachelor's degree in geography or a related field required.

The downside: Cartographers spend plenty of time indoors. AMC cartographer Larry Garland spends hours behind his desk, sifting through data and creating

digital maps for the club's guidebooks. But on field days, he hikes throughout the Northeast, logging notes and data points with an ultraprecise 8-pound GPS system for up to a week at a time. He's trekked thousands of trail miles in nearly 20 years with the AMC. "You put your heart and soul into the map," Garland says.

PAY \$61,000 **PREREQUISITES** Bachelor's degree **PERKS** Never get lost again **PROBLEMS** Desk time **PROSPECTS** 14,500 jobs by 2022 (+20%)

A marine ecologist goes deep to study ocean wildlife.



Marine Ecologist

Mike Heithaus, 41
Florida International University / Miami, FL

→ Think: Floating among reef sharks in the crystalline waters of French Polynesia, tagging tiger sharks and sea turtles on a six-month research expedition in Australia, capturing alligators in the Everglades. "It is a real privilege to go to such amazing places and work with animals that a lot of people never even get to see," says Mike Heithaus, whose work aims to educate others about marine ecosystems and promote their conservation. As a professor, he's also shaping the next generation of ocean protectors.

The ocean is the ultimate wilderness, containing 50 to 80 percent of all life on Earth and covering 71 percent of the planet's surface. That means marine ecologists, who study interactions between the ocean and its inhabitants, have a huge office—and an equally important job to do, as climate change, pollution, and population growth continue to threaten the ocean and its creatures.

The government employs more than half of all wildlife biologists, the umbrella category for marine ecologists. Average salaries range from \$54,000 (for state employees) on up to \$80,000 (federal), with a master's degree.

Less exciting aspects of the job? Engine repair ("something's always breaking"), grant writing (to fund research), and seasickness. "If you haven't been seasick, you haven't spent enough days on the water," Heithaus says.

PAY \$58,000 **PREREQUISITES** most have a master's **PERKS** Swimming, sweet sunsets **PROBLEMS** The urgent intractability of climate change **PROSPECTS** 21,100 jobs by 2022 for all wildlife biologists (+5%)



The Waitukubuli National Trail traverses lush mountains high above the Dominican coast.




If You Build It, Will They Hike?

**YOU CAN NOW DISCOVER THE OTHER CARIBBEAN
ON DOMINICA'S NEW LONG TRAIL. BUT SHOULD YOU?**

BY KELLY BASTONE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY RACHID DAHNOUN

Guidebook writer
Michael Eugene (left)
and the author stand
above Emerald Pool in
section 5.





The rumble coming from somewhere off in the rainforest should cue me to trouble. I'm hiking toward 275-foot Middleham Falls, the tallest cascade on the Caribbean island of Dominica, and I expect to see what I'd previewed in photos:

A gauzy, decorative ribbon trickling into the kind of pool where tropical maidens in shampoo commercials lather their hair. I'd imagined taking a dip myself, if only to wash away the grime of my third day on the Waitukubuli National Trail (WNT), a new 115-mile path that runs the length of the island and links hot springs, rainforests, cliff-rimmed beaches, and waterfalls. But recent rains have turned the normally tame Middleham into a neck-snapping fire hose.

Bullets of mist sting my eyes when I try to look into the white cloud swirling before me. My companions—two Dominicans serving as unofficial guides, plus a photographer—ham it up with a few “storm-pummeled newsman” routines, then we all start hiking back along the spur trail toward the WNT. Only now, there's a brand-new waterfall raging across our route.

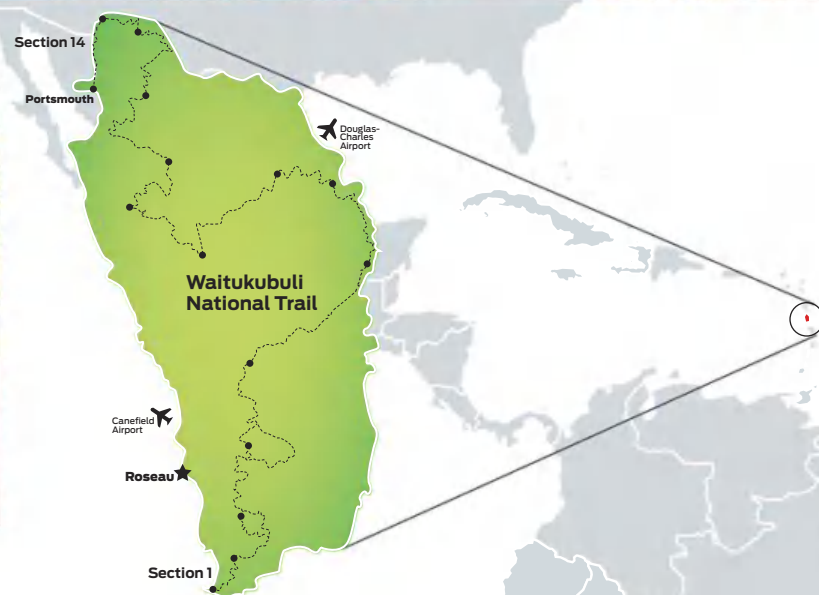
“We're cut off!” shouts Michael Eugene, the WNT's bespectacled guidebook author who talks like a scholar but hikes like an Ironman (he's personally walked every mile of trail in his native land). He's visibly rattled, and I make a conscious effort to slow my breathing as I realize our situation could turn dire: With a Niagara right behind us and its mini-me ahead, what's to say they won't merge into an even bigger flood pouring down where we now stand? We need to get out of here, pronto.

We link arms and long-limbed Howard Ambrose, a hiking guide who moonlights as Dominica's star basketball player, wades into the rushing current flowing out of the fall. The water swirls around his knees, but I'm half his height. It rises above my waist. “Don't lose me!” I shout above the roar, hoping to sound more cavalier than terrified.

In the midst of the dicey ford, it dawns on me what a gamble this hiking



Clockwise from top left: The author hikes along the Atlantic coast in section 6; a boa crosses the trail; in some places the coastline is too rugged for a trail; local “bush rum” is infused with fresh anise; a traditional carving at Kalinago Barana Aute; wild nutmeg. Opposite: The author is dwarfed by a chatanier tree, also called a buttress root tree.





ISLAND
GALLERY

See more
WNT photos at
[backpacker.com/
dominica](http://backpacker.com/dominica).

route really is. Dominica developed the Waitukubuli National Trail to bolster eco-tourism. That's right, this cash-poor country is looking to adventuresome backpackers to boost the economy. The hope is that hiker revenue can bring prosperity to the island's rural villages without blighting its wild mountains and rainforests. If that happens, Dominica's success might embolden other destinations to build trails, not mega-resorts. But with the current tugging at my legs, I have to wonder: Is this new route ready for prime time? Will Dominica's big bet pay off?

DOMINICA IS NOT to be confused with the Dominican Republic. That country produces fine cigars (like Cuba, its neighbor). Dominica, a much smaller country in the Windward Islands 280 miles east of St. Croix, exports nothing of consequence. The steepness of its mountains thwarted logging, its banana industry collapsed after losing battles with fungal blights and bigger Central American producers, and its rum is just so-so.

Nor does Dominica attract many tourists; at least, not compared to other Caribbean destinations. In the British Virgin Islands, 300 miles away, tourism accounts for 58 percent of the GDP. It's just 25 percent here. Dominica's mountainous jungle and cliffy shorelines don't attract the typical Caribbean vacationer seeking talcum-soft beaches (of which Dominica has none).

Even its primary airport remains small-scale, because there's no place on the island flat enough for long, jumbo-jet runways.

So instead of courting global resort chains, this country of 72,000 started branding itself as "The Nature Island" in 2006. With 41,303 acres preserved as wilderness (about 20 percent of the country), Dominica contains more protected lands than anyplace else in the Caribbean, and is said to be the only Caribbean island that Christopher Columbus would still recognize today (in fact, its unspoiled landscape attracted *Pirates of the Caribbean* film crews in 2005 and 2007). Its snorkeling and diving rank among the best in the world (find both at Champagne Reef). Dayhikes lead to geothermal marvels such as 198°F, 200-foot diameter Boiling Lake and the fumarole-ridden wasteland known as the Valley of Desolation.

The notion that long-distance trails can stimulate rural economies is not without precedent. The Appalachian Trail has brought shuttle services, hostels, and outfitters to rural areas all along the route. The Pennine Way has done the same in England. So the Dominican government spent more than \$4 million building the WNT, making it the largest non-road infrastructure project ever attempted in Dominica. The trail, completed in 2011, is the Caribbean's first long-distance hiking route. "Waitukubuli" is the indigenous name for the island; it means "tall is her body," referring to the mountains

that rise almost 5,000 feet from the sea.

"Already, communities that have never gotten dollars from tourism are offering homestays and working as guides, exchanging their life stories in a sustainable industry," says Eugene, a tour operator who studied chemical engineering at The City College of New York and only later discovered what he considers to be his true calling: hiking, and growing eco-tourism in Dominica. He helped bring the WNT to fruition by developing its management plan and instituting global trail standards (islanders might embrace unmarked trailheads and uncleared landslides, but Americans and Europeans prefer ample signage and trail maintenance). Though the trail is still relatively unknown, Dominica's Ministry of Tourism and Urban Renewal estimates that the island already sees about \$282,000 annually from WNT thru-hikers, who spend about 10 days on the trail (plus an unknown amount from section hikers). That's still a small slice of the tourism pie, but it's an important slice, as it's increasing the number of overnight travelers who visit rural areas (as opposed to the cruise ship tourists who only spend a few hours ashore in the port area). But Eugene dreams big: His current goal is to get the WNT recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, like Japan's Kumano Kodo and Spain's Camino de Santiago.

I'd never felt compelled to visit the Caribbean's beach resorts—but a multiday

hiking route through pristine mountains is my kind of vacation. The last Caribbean island to be colonized by Europeans, Dominica seemed like a throwback to the long-lost BCM (Before Club Med) era, and this trail promised a way in. By hiking through rare, virgin rainforest, meandering across empty beaches, and soaking in natural hot springs, I'd check off the exercise and exploration boxes on my "perfect vacation" list. Plus, I'd round that out with the stuff everyone rightly loves about the Caribbean: fresh fish for dinner, tree-ripe tropical fruits, lingering sunsets.

My pretrip planning included researching the island's rare birds, but no fitness training. After all, I'm accustomed to the Rockies'

big, lung-straining elevation gains, and the Sierras have turned my photographer pal Rachid Dahnoun into a mountain-climbing machine. Hiking in the Caribbean? How hard could it be?

FROM DOMINICA'S capital, Roseau, Rachid and I (and Eugene, who's hiking the first three days with us) caught a half-hour van ride to the trailhead in the fishing village of Scotts Head, at the southernmost tip of the island. After snapping a few photos of brightly painted dories, we followed WNT signs up a steep, paved road. Land crabs, flushed from the ground by yesterday's rains, scattered from our approach

like cockroaches. "Tasty cockroaches," said Eugene, explaining that they make an excellent bisque.

The pavement ended and the dirt trail climbed steeply, like New England's notorious elevator shafts. I was glad for our laughably light packs. Overnight camping is permitted along the WNT, but most hikers opt to stay in hostel-like accommodations that have sprung up along the route. That's because the trail rarely wanders farther than a few miles from any town. Except for sections seven through nine, which plumb roadless rainforest (carrying a hammock there is ideal), the rest of the trail lends itself to Euro-style overnights in hiker refuges like Rodney's Wellness Retreat in Soufriere, our crash pad between sections one and two.

Rodney's version of "glamping" is simple but comfy: big, basecamp-size tents filled with fat airbeds and colorful cotton rugs. Hammocks link some of the property's cashew, mango, and breadfruit trees, but instead of napping, Rachid and I walked five minutes down the road to Soufriere's hot spring, which bubbles out of a black-sand beach lapped by gentle waves. Lying in the shallow 105°F water, we confessed to feeling more worked than we'd expected to be after our first day. Though we'd covered just 5 miles, we'd enjoyed no gentle grades, and every step challenged our footing with rocks, roots, or mud. But the warm soak and an icy Kubuli beer back at Rodney's felt plenty restorative, as did the next morning's breakfast of traditional Dominican porridge sprinkled with homegrown nutmeg and papaya. "There is only one way to understand Dominica," Rodney's proprietor Bevin Lewis said while waving us farewell. "You have to walk across it."

Preferably with an umbrella. Rain lacquered the coffee trees we hiked past on section two and filled the forest with mist. "Liquid sunshine" is what Eugene and others call the showers, either out of appreciation or marketing spin. What's certain: Dominica's mountains are so steep that past inhabitants decided it was easier to hack a tunnel into the rock with hand tools rather than suffer all the ups and downs. For nearly a quarter-mile, we hiked across a blessedly horizontal piece of trail created by that rock cutout, which seemed to underscore Lewis's point: Topography is destiny in Dominica. It shapes the island's travel, weather, villages, agriculture, and now, tourism.

What it doesn't do is afford big views. Despite the constant climbing, the WNT's green tunnel is more AT than PCT. But we soon learned to appreciate the jungle's subtler rewards. We discovered cinnamon trees and gommier trunks that ooze a flammable sap and grow so fat that indigenous Caribs carved them into sea-going canoes. We stayed alert for a glimpse or call of one of Dominica's two endemic parrots, the ultra-rare Sisserou and the Jaco. Even the trees laden with ripe mangoes—which until now I'd only



Waterfalls are everywhere along the WNT. This one is at the end of section 3.

LIQUID SUNSHINE HITS HARD

Last August, tropical storm Erika's torrential rain and wind created one of the worst natural disasters in Dominica's history. At press time, all WNT segments except for 8 and 10 had reopened to hikers. For an up-to-the-minute report, call the WNT office at (767) 440-6125, or email tourism@dominica.dm.

seen in grocery stores—seemed exotic. We plucked mangoes from the branches, peeled them like bananas, and devoured the sweet, drippy fruit. How could I ever go back to the dried stuff?

Dominica has other surprises in store. The Rockies may have better vistas, but they never produced a trail angel like the dreadlocked savior who appeared at the end of section two, driving a black pickup bound for Harmony Gardens. Roy Ormond and his wife Sharon—Dominica's version of tree-hugging hippies—run an organic farm and minister to hikers by providing tent accommodations and cooking Ital food, the vegan diet observed by strict Rastafarians.

"I knew something good was coming my way today, I just sensed it," Sharon said as she hugged me tight like a long-lost auntie. We sipped lemongrass tea, talked reggae music, and feasted on Sharon's shredded pumpkin patties. The pair described the flutes and walking staffs that Roy carves from forest bamboo, and told stories about the boggling diversity of forest plants that they continue to harvest as generations of their ancestors had. "The forest is our medicine cabinet," Roy said.

I FINALLY GOT my vista on day six, atop a coastline that makes Hawaii's Na Pali look B-list. I was standing on the bouldery seam between Dominica's eastern cliffs and the wind-churned Atlantic Ocean, and I was aching to pick my way north along the water. But the WNT doesn't cut across the vertical rock jutting out of the ocean. It looked impossible. Instead, it heads inland and burrows through cassava farms.

The coast is home to the Kalinago, the 3,000 remaining members of the indigenous tribe that Christopher Columbus named "Carib," and they're as disappointed as I was about the trail's routing. After deeming the cliffy shoreline too rugged (read: expensive) for trail building, the Dominican government opted to route the WNT inland over existing farm roads and village footpaths. The Kalinago felt shortchanged—an understandable reaction after decades of racial discrimination. (The Kalinago Territory ranks as one of the island's poorest, receiving electric lighting as recently as 1986. Water and sewage systems weren't installed until 2000.)

Community leaders are investigating whether the Kalinago Territory, perhaps with international help, might be able to construct the oceanside route that the gov-



Glamping at Rodney's Wellness Retreat costs \$45 per night.

ernment wouldn't attempt. In the meantime, the tribe established the Kalinago Barana Autê cultural center around the WNT, so that the trail winds among its sculpture gardens, traditional thatched straw meeting houses, and cassava bread bakery. I bought a few loaves (they looked and tasted like extra-thick tortillas) and watched a group of women making baskets, the tribe's signature handicraft. "Showing off our culture for visitors rekindled our own pride and self-respect," the center's manager told us. He said that the revenue earned by selling hikers baskets, bread, lodging, and guide services is just one of many positive effects the trail has brought.

That night we slept in the home of Regina Joseph, a brawny Kalinago grande dame who rents her spare room to hikers. She was also in the process of building a traditional thatched-roof hut where she plans to host future visitors in hammocks, per Kalinago custom. She related stories of her voyages in the 48-foot *kanawa* that she and others carved from a gommier tree and paddled 60 miles to Guadeloupe, as her forebears used to do. The next morning, she served Dominican cocoa tea, made with fresh coconut milk blended with cacao and other spices that Joseph grinds herself. The drink was musky and exotic, like a tropical hot chocolate. It offered still more evidence that the WNT is a multi-sensory experience, with taste high on the list.

I was reminded of this again on the day we got trapped by the rising water. I wouldn't have made it across the flooding stream without help from our long-armed guide. He hauls me to safety and we slosh along the WNT to a road crossing where we spy a makeshift food stand with a hand-painted sign reading "Dani's Snack Dee-lite."

We duck beneath the blue tarp roof, still buzzing with nerves after our treacherous river crossing. A break for steaming pork stew and a few lumps of coconut candy sounds just fine. And would I like to try Dani's special anise moonshine? Why, sure.

Raising the shot of bush liquor feels like a toast. *Here's to the unlikelyst long trail I've ever hiked*, I think. It's still a gamble, but I like the odds. ■

Kelly Bastone is still trying to make Dominican cocoa tea back home in Colorado.

TRIP PLANNER

SEASON Dominica is driest from November through April (July through September brings occasional hurricanes). **GUIDE** Michael Eugene helped create the WNT, and coordinates guides and shuttles for it and all of Dominica's hiking trails: experiencescaribbean.com. **INFO** Browse segment maps and descriptions at waitukubulitail.com (this site was down at press time, but the government says it will be back up). **GUIDEBOOK** *A Users' Guide to the Waitukubuli National Trail Dominica* contains detailed maps, hike descriptions, photos, and homestay providers. Unfortunately, all copies have sold out. Beg, borrow, or bribe your way into getting one, or email wntp@dominica.gov.dm for trail info. **PERMITS** Buy a \$12 WNT day pass or \$40 two-week permit at the Douglas-Charles Airport, at the Forestry, Wildlife, and National Parks Division office in Roseau, or at various locations across the island. Visit waitukubulitail.com for a complete list.

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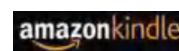
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LAKE MAGOG

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From Magog, head northwest on the Sunburst Lake spur and up 9,039-foot Nub Peak. Near mile 1.3, split east up the super-short spur to Niblet, an overlook midway up the mountain.

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